Illumination

Book: 82

Nevaeh

Marcel Ray Duriez

9 PORT ANGELES

Anny was faster than the chef, so we were in Big Sur at 6:06. It had been a while since I had had a girl's night out and the estrogen boost was invigorating. We listened to whiny rock songs while Charity-Anna talked about the guys we were spending time together with. Charity-Anna's dinner with Buddy had gone well and she was hoping they would go to the first kiss stage on Saturday night. I smile to myself, satisfied. Jeannette was passively happy to go

to the ball, but not interested in J.A. Anny tried to get her to admit who her type was, but I cut her off after a while with a question about dresses, to spare her. Jeannette gave me a grateful look.

Big Sur was a wonderful little tourist trap, much more polished and quirkier than McAuley. But Charity-Anna and Jeannette knew that all too well, so they were not going to waste time on the scenic bayside promenade. Anny went straight to the only department store

in town, a few blocks from the visitor- friendly bay.

The dance was billed as semi-formal, and we were not sure what that meant. Charity-Anna and Jeannette both looked surprised and in disbelief when I told them I had never been to a prom in Phoenix.

'You've never been with a friend or what?' Anny asked dubiously as we walked through the doors of the store.

'Really,' I tried to convince her, without telling her about my dancing problems. 'I never had a

boyfriend or anything close. I did not go out much.

'Why the hell not?' Charity-Anna asked.

'Nobody asked me,' I answered honestly.

She had l 'People ask you here,' she reminded me, 'and you say no.' We were now in the junior section, scanning the shelves for fancy clothes. for Tyler,' Jeannette corrected softly

'Excuse me?' I gasped. 'What did you say?' Charity-Anna said, eyes suspicious.

'What did he say?' I looked like I was choking.

'I told you that wasn't true,' Jeannette muttered to Charity-Anna.

I remained silent, still absorbed in shock that quickly turned to irritation. But we had found the clothes racks and now we had work to do.

'That's why Emily doesn't like you,' Charity-Anna chuckled as we searched through the clothes.

I gritted my teeth. 'Do you think if I crashed my car, he won't feel guilty about the accident anymore?'

'Maybe,' Anny chuckled. 'If that's why he's doing it.'

The clothing choices were not huge, but they both found a few things to try I sat in a low chair just inside the locker room by the one-way mirror trying to control my smoking Anny was torn between two

- one a long number basic black strapless, the other a knee- length electric blue with spaghetti straps. I encouraged her to go for blue; why oh do the eyes not play? Jeannette chose a light pink dress that hugged her long body and brought out honey tones in her light brown hair. I generously complimented them both and helped by returning the rejected pieces to their shelves. The entire process was much shorter and easier than the comparable trips I had taken with Allison at home. There

was something to be said about the limited choices.

We went to buy shoes and accessories. While they tried things on, I just watched and criticized, not in the mood to shop for myself, even if I needed new shoes. After I was annoyed with Tyler, the girls' nighttime euphoria faded, giving way to the gloom to return.

'Jeannette? I started hesitantly as she tried on a pair of strappy pink heels - she was thrilled to have a date long enough for her to wear high heels.

Charity-Anna had walked over to the jewelry counter, and we were alone.

'Yes?' She stretched out her leg and twisted her ankle to see the shoe better.

I dropped. 'I like that one.'

'I think I'm going to have them, although they never match this dress,' she mused.

'Oh, come on, they're on sale,' I encouraged her. She smiled and put the lid back on a box of more practical off-white shoes.

I tried again. 'Uh, Jeannette...' She looked up curiously.

'Is it normal that the...Shezor' - I kept my eyes on the shoes - 'don't go to school often?' I failed miserably in my attempt to appear flippant.

'Yes, when the weather is nice, they go backpacking all the time - even the doctor. They are all out there,' she told me softly, also checking her shoes. She did not ask a single question, without talking about the hundreds that Charity-

Anna would have dropped. I started to like Jeannette.

'Oh.' I dropped the subject when Charity-Anna came back to show us the rhinestone jewelry, she had found that matched her shoes Wahad planned to eat at a little Italian restaurant on the boardwalk, but the clothes shopping did not take as long as we expected. Anny and Jeannette put their clothes back in the car and then walked to the bay. said I would meet them at the restaurant in an hour - I wanted to find a bookstore They were both

willing to come with me, but I encouraged them to have fun - they did not know how busy I could be when I was surrounded by books; it was something I preferred to do alone. They walked happily chatting to the car and I drove in the direction Anny pointed.

I had no trouble finding the bookstore, but it was not what I was looking for. The windows were full of crystals, dreamcatchers, and spiritual healing books. I did not even enter. Through the window, I could see a woman in her fifties with

long gray hair cut straight down her back, wearing a 60s dress, smiling from behind the counter. I decided this was a conversation I could skip. There must have been a regular bookstore in town.

I wandered the streets that were filling up with the end of the working day, hoping to go downtown. I did not pay much attention to where I was going; I struggled against despair. I tried so hard not to think about him, and what Jeannette said… and more than anything, I tried to beat my hopes for Saturday,

fearing a disappointment more painful than the others, when I looked up to see someone's silver Volvo parked along the street and it all came to me. Stupid, untrustworthy vampire, I thought.

I stomped further south, toward glass- fronted shops that looked promising. But when I arrived, they were just a repair shop and a space. I still had too much time to find Anny and Jeannette, and I had to calm down before seeing them again. I ran my fingers through my

hair several times and took a deep breath before turning the corner.

As I crossed another road, I began to realize that I was going in the wrong direction. The few pedestrians I saw were heading north, and it looked like the buildings here were mostly warehouses. I decided to head east around the next corner and after a few blocks turn around and try my luck on another street on the way back to the boardwalk.

A group of four men rounded the corner where I was

going, dressed too casually to come home from the office, but they were too dirty to be tourists. As they approached me, I realized they were not too many years older than me. They joked among themselves, laughed exuberantly, and punched each other in the arms. I slid as far down the sidewalk as I could to give them space, then walked quickly and looked behind them to the corner.

'Hi there!' one of them shouted when they passed, and he had to talk to me because there was no one else around. I automatically

looked up. Two of them had stopped, and the other two had slowed down. The closest, a burly, dark- haired man in his twenties, seemed to be the one who had spoken. He wore an open flannel shirt over a dirty T-shirt, cropped jeans, and sandals. He took a half-step toward me.

'Hello,' I mumbled, a thoughtful response. Then I quickly looked away and walked faster towards the corner. I could hear them laughing at full volume behind me.

'Hey, wait!' one of them called out to me again, but I kept my head down and turned the corner with a sigh of relief. I could still hear them laughing behind me.

I was on a sidewalk that led to the back of several gloomy warehouses, each with large doors for unloading trucks, with a padlock for the night. The south side of the street had no sidewalks, just a barbed wire fence that protected some sort of engine parts warehouse. I had wandered far beyond the part of Big Sur that I was supposed to see

as a guest. It was getting dark, I realized, the clouds finally came back, piling up on the western horizon, creating an early sunset. The sky to the east was still clear, but gray, interlaced with pink and orange streaks. I had left my coat in the car and a sudden shiver made me cross my arms tightly over my chest. Only one van passed me, then the road was empty.

The sky suddenly darkened and as I looked over my shoulder to stare at the offending cloud, I realized with a shock that two men

were walking quietly six meters behind me.

They belonged to the same group that I had passed on the corner of the street, but the black man who had spoken to me was not either. I at once turned my head forward and quickened my stride. A shiver that had nothing to do with the weather made me shiver again. My bag hung on a shoulder strap, and I slung it across my body like you should carry it, so it would not be ripped off. I knew exactly where my pepper spray was - still in my gym

bag under the bed, never unpacked. I did not have much money on me, only twenty-something, and I thought about 'accidentally' dropping my bag and walking away. But a small, fearful voice inside me warned me that they could be worse than thieves.

I listened carefully to their silent footsteps, which were far too soft compared to the impetuous noise they had made before, and it did not seem like they were speeding up or getting closer. Breathe, I had to remind myself. You do not know they

are following you. I kept walking as fast as I could without really running, concentrating on the right turn which was only a few meters away. I could hear them as far away as before. A blue car hit the south street and quickly passed me. I thought about jumping on it, but I hesitated, braked, not knowing if I was being chased, and by then it was too late.

I reached the corner, but a glance revealed it was just a blind alley in the back of another building. I was half expecting; I had to hastily correct myself and run down the

narrow alley to the sidewalk. The street ended at the next corner, where there was a stop sign. I focused on the light steps behind me and decided whether to run or not. They were ringing further away, however, and I knew they could at least outrun me. I was sure to trip and stretch if I tried to go faster. The footsteps were certainly further back. I ventured a glance over my shoulder, and they were forty feet behind now, I saw with relief. But they were both looking at me.[Text Wrapping Break]~*~

It seemed like an eternity before I got around the corner. I kept my steady pace, the men behind me trailing behind with every step. They realized they feared me and regretted it. I saw two cars driving north past the intersection I was heading toward and felt relieved. There would be more people if I got out of this deserted street. I hop around the corner with a grateful sigh.

- And-

Then skidded to a stop.

The street was bordered on both sides by empty walls, without doors, and without windows. In the distance, at two intersections, I saw streetlamps, cars, and more pedestrians, but they were all too far away. Because against the west building, halfway down the street, sat the other two men in the group, both watching excitedly as I froze to death on the sidewalk. I then realized that I was not being followed.

I was driven to this.

I only stopped for a second, but it felt exceptionally long. I turned

around and ran across the road. I had a significant sense that it was a wasted effort. The footsteps behind me were stronger now.

'There you are!' The booming voice of the stocky dark-haired man broke the intense silence and startled me. In the growing darkness, he was looking behind me.

'Yes,' a voice shouted behind me, making me jump again as I tried to hurry down the street. 'We only took a short detour.'

My steps must have slowed down now. I too quickly reduced the

distance between me and the couple in the living room. I let out a good cry and sucked in the air, preparing to use it, but my throat was so dry I was not sure how much volume I could handle. With a quick movement, I slid my pack over my head and grabbed the strap with one hand, ready to put it back on or use it as a weapon if needed.

The stocky man shrugged as I cautiously stopped and walked slowly down the street.

'Stay away from me,' I warned in a voice that must have

sounded strong and fearless. But I was right about the dry throat - no volume.

'Don't be like that, honey,' he shouted, and the hoarse laughter started up behind me again.

I stiffened, feet apart, trying to remember through my panic what little self- defense I knew. The heel of the hand comes up, hopefully breaking the nose or pushing it into the brain. Finger in the eye socket - try to hook and pull out the eye. And the standard knee to the groin of course. That same

pessimistic voice in my head spoke then, reminding me that I would not stand a chance against one of them, and that was four. Shut up! I commanded the voice before terror could bring me down. I did not go out without bringing someone. I tried to swallow it so I could let out a decent cry.

The headlights suddenly turned around the corner, the car nearly hit the stocky, forcing her to jump onto the sidewalk. I jumped on the road - this car would stop or hit me. But the silver car came

unexpectedly and skidded to a stop with the passenger door open a few feet away from me.

'Come in,' ordered an angry voice.

It was amazing how the suffocating fear disappeared instantly, amazing how the sense of security suddenly overwhelmed me - even before I was off the street - as soon as I heard his voice. I jumped up on the chair and slammed the door behind me.

It was dark in the car, no lights had come on when the door

opened, and I could barely see his face in the glow of the dashboard. The tires squealed as he veered north, accelerated too quickly, and swerved toward the dazed men on the street. I spotted them diving down the sidewalk as we straightened up and ran towards the harbor.

'Put on your seatbelt,' he ordered, and I realized I was holding the seat with both hands. I quickly obeyed; the click when the strap was attached was loud in the dark. He took a sharp left turn, raced forward,

and went through several stop signs without a break.

But I felt completely safe and was not worried at all about where we were going at this point. I stared into his face with deep relief, relief beyond my sudden release. I studied his flawless features in the dark, waiting for my breathing to return to normal, until I realized his expression was deadly angry.

'Are you OK?' I asked, surprised at how hoarse my voice sounded.

'No,' he snapped, angrily.

I sat in silence watching his face as his burning eyes stared straight ahead until the car came to an abrupt stop. I looked around, but it was too dark to see anything but the faint silhouette of the dark trees that lined the road. We were out of town.

'Lilla? he asked, his voice tight, controlled.

'Yes?' My voice was still hoarse. I calmly tried to clear my throat.

'How are you?' He still was not looking at me, but the anger was clear on his face.

'Yes,' I moaned softly.

'Please distract me,' he ordered.

'I'm sorry, what?'

He execrated abruptly.

'Just talk about something unimportant until I calm down,' he clarified, closing his eyes, and pinching the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

'Uh.' I broke my brain for something insignificant. 'Am I going to crush Tyler Crowley before school tomorrow?'

He still closed his eyes, but the corner of his mouth was shaking.

'Why?'

'He tells everyone he's taking me to prom - either he's crazy or he's still trying to make up for the fact that I was almost killed last... well, you remember, and he thinks it's kind of the ball rolling, that's the right way to go So, I'm suggesting that if I put his life in danger, we're

even, and he can't keep trying to make it right I don't need enemies and maybe Emily would back down if he left me alone Maybe I should total his Sentra But if he doesn't have an elevator he can't take anyone to the prom promo...' I stammered.

'I heard about it.' He looked a little calmer.

'You, did it?' I asked in disbelief, my earlier irritation flared up. 'If he's paralyzed from the neck down, he can't go to the ball either,' I mumbled, refining my plan.

Melvin sighed and finally opened his eyes.

'Better?'

'Not really.' But he stopped talking. He leaned his head against the seat and stared at the ceiling of the car.

I have been waiting, hasn't it?' My voice came out in a whisper.

'Sometimes, I have a problem with my mood, Lilla.' He whispered too, and as he stared out the window, his eyes narrowed into slits., 'But it wouldn't do me any good

to turn around and look for this...' He did not finish his sentence, looking away and struggling for a moment to regain control of his anger. 'At least,' continued he said, I try to convince myself.

'Oh.' The word seemed inappropriate, but I could not think of a better answer.

We sat in silence again. I glanced over. Looked at the clock on the dashboard. It was half past five.

'Charity-Anna and Jeannette are going to be worried,' I mumbled. 'I should have met them.'

He started the engine without a word of more, turned smoothly and accelerated towards the city We were under the streetlights in no time, always too fast, weaving with ease through the slow- moving cars s on the curb It parked parallel to the curb in a space I had thought was far too small for the Volvo, but it slipped in effortlessly at once. I looked out the window to see the lights of La Lilla Italia, and Anny and Jeannette, who had just left, running away from us in fear. did you know where...?' I

started, but then I just shook my head. I heard the door open and turned to see him exit.

'What are you doing?'

I asked. He smiled a little, but his eyes were hard. He got out of the car and slammed the door. I rushed out of the car too. He was waiting for me on the sidewalk.

He spoke before I 'Go arrest Charity-Anna and Jeannette before I must find them too. I do not think I can hold myself back if I bump into your other friends again.'

I shivered at the menace in her voice.

'Anny! Jeannette!' I yelled at them and motioned for them to turn around. They ran towards me, the distinct relief on both of their faces simultaneously turning to surprise when they saw who I was standing next to. They hesitated a few meters from us.

'Where were you?' Charity-Anna's voice sounded suspicious.

'I'm lost,' I admitted shyly. 'And then I bumped into Melvin.' I waved at him,

'Would it be okay if I went with you? I have never used his talents in them before.' Like

I was not very well - I am not hungry.' I shrugged.

'I think you should eat something.' Melvin's voice was low, but full of authority. He looked up at Charity-Anna and spoke a little louder. 'Do you mind if I take Lilla home tonight? So, you do not have to wait while she eats.

' Um, no problem, I guess...' She bit her lip, trying to say. my expression if I wanted to. I winked at

him. I wanted nothing more than to be alone with my eternal savior. There were so many questions I could not bombard until we let us be alone.

'Okay.' Jeannette was faster than Charity-Anna. 'See you tomorrow, Lilla…Melvin.' She grabbed Charity-Anna's hand and pulled her towards the car, which I could see a short distance away. distance, parked across the first street. When they walked in, Anny turned around and waved a curious face. I waved back, waiting for them

to leave. Frankly, I was not hungry,' I insisted, looking up to examine his face. His expression was unreadable.

'Make me happy.'

He walked to the door of the restaurant and held it open with a stubborn expression. Obviously, there would be no further discussion. With a resigned sigh, I walked past him into the restaurant.

The restaurant was not busy - it was off season in Big Sur the host was a woman, and I understood the look in her eyes as she assessed Melvin. She greeted him a little

warmer than necessary. I was surprised at how much it irritated me. She was several centimeters taller than me and was abnormally blond. A table for two? His voice was seductive, whether he was aiming at it or not. I saw his eyes move to me and then back away, pleased with my obvious banality and the careful, contactless space Melvin kept between us. She led us to a table large enough for four in the center of the busiest part of the dining room.

I was about to sit down, but Melvin shook his head.

'Maybe a little more private?' He calmly asked the host. I was not sure, but it looked like he was gently tipping her. I had never seen anyone turn down a table, except in old movies.

'Without a doubt.' She looked as surprised as me. She turned and led us around a fence to a small circle of cabins - all empty. 'How is it?'

'Perfect.' He flashed her his bright smile, numbing her for a moment.

'Uh' - she shook her head and blinked - 'your server is coming soon.' She walked unsteadily.

'You really shouldn't do this to people,' I slammed. 'It is not fair.'

'Do what?'

'So, dazzle them - she's probably hyperventilating in the kitchen right now.'

He looked confused.

'Oh, come on,' I said hesitantly. 'You have to know what effect you have on people.'

He tilted his head to one side and his eyes were curious. 'I blind people? '

Haven't you noticed?' Do you think everyone gets their way so easily?

He ignored my questions. 'Am I blinding you?'

'Often,' I admitted.

-And-

Then our server arrived, waiting for his face. The host had certainly gotten behind the scenes, and this new girl did not look

disappointed. She pushed a lock of short black hair behind one ear and smiled with unnecessary warmth.

'Hello. My name is Taylor, and I will be your server tonight. What can I make you drink? I did not miss her talking to him alone.

He looked at me.

'I'm going to have a Coke.' It sounded like a question.

'Two Cokes,' he said.

'I'll get to that in a minute,' she assured him with another useless

smile. But he did not see it. He looked at me.

'What?' I asked when she was leaving.

His eyes stayed on my face. 'How do you feel?'

'I'm fine,' I replied, surprised by his intensity.

'Don't you feel dizzy, sick, cold...?'

'I'm going?'

He laughs at my surprised tone.

'Well, I'm actually expecting you to be in shock.' His face twisted into that perfect crooked smile.

'I don't think that will happen,' I said when I could breathe again. 'I've always been very good at deleting unpleasant things.'

'Still, I'll feel better if you have sugar and food in you.'

Just in time the server arrived with our drinks and a basket of breadsticks. She stood with her back to me as she placed them on the table.

'You chose?' She asked Melvin.

'Lilla? He asked. She turned to me involuntarily.

I chose the first thing I saw on the menu. 'Uh...I'll have the mushroom ravioli.'

'And you?' She turned to him with a smile.

'Not for me,' he said. Of course not.

'Let me know if you change your mind.' The shy smile was still

there, but he did not look at her and she left unsatisfied.

'Drink,' he ordered.

I obediently sipped my soda, then drank deeper, surprised at how thirsty I was. I realized I was done when he pushed his glass toward me.

'Thank you,' I mumbled, still thirsty. The chill of the ice-cold soda ran through my chest, and I shivered.

'Are you cold?'

'It's just the Coke,' I explained, shivering again.

'You don't have a coat?' His voice was disapproving.

'Yes.' I looked at the empty sofa next to me. 'Oh - I left it in Charity-Anna's car,' I realized.

Melvin took off his jacket. I suddenly realized that I had never noticed what he was wearing - not just tonight, but someday. I just could not look away from his face. I let myself watch now, concentrating. He has now taken off a light beige leather jacket; underneath he wore

an ivory turtleneck sweater. It fitted her perfectly and emphasized how muscular her chest was.

He handed me the jacket and interrupted my eyelid.

'Thank you,' I said again, slipping my arms into his coat. It was cold, as my coat smelled when I first picked it up in the morning, hanging in the drafty hallway. I grimaced again. It smelled good. I interceded and tried to recognize the wonderful smell. It did not smell of cologne. The sleeves were far too long; I slid them to free my hands.

'That shade of blue goes well with your skin,' he said looking at me. I was surprised; I looked down, blushing naturally.

He pushed the breadbasket towards me.

'Really, I'm not going to be in shock,' I protested.

'You should be - a normal person would be. You do not even look shocked.' He seemed agitated. He looked into my eyes, and I saw how clear his eyes were, clearer than I had ever seen them, golden caramel.

'I feel very safe with you,' I confessed, mesmerized by the idea of telling the truth again.

This displeased him; his alabaster eyebrow wrinkled. He shook his head, frowning.

'It's more complicated than expected,' he muttered to himself.

I grabbed a breadstick and started nibbling on the end to gauge his expression. I wondered when it would be good to question him.

'You're normally in a better mood when your eyes are this

bright,' I remarked, trying to distract him from the thought that had him frowning and gloomy.

He stared at me, stunned. 'What?'

'You're always grumpier when your eyes are black - I expect that,' I continued. 'I have a theory about it.'

His eyes narrowed. 'More theories?'

'Mm- hm.' I chewed on a small bite of the bread, trying to look indifferent.

'I hope you were more creative this time... or are you still stealing from comic books?' His faint smile was mocking; his eyes were still tight.

'Well, no, I didn't get it from a comic book, but I didn't produce it on my own, either' I confessed.

'And?' he prompted.

But then the server strode around the partition with my food. I realized we had been unconsciously leaning toward each other across the table because we both straightened up as she approached. She set the

dish in front of me - it looked good - and turned quickly to Melvin.

'Did you change your mind?' she asked. 'Isn't there anything I can get you?' I may have been imagining the double meaning in her words.

'No, thank you, but some more soda would be nice.' He gestured with a long white hand to the empty cups in front of me.

'Sure.' She removed the empty glasses and walked away.

'You were saying?' He asked.

'I will tell you about it in the car. If...' I paused.

'There are conditions?' He raised one eyebrow, his voice ominous.

'I do have a few questions, of course.'

'Of course.'

The server was back with two more Cokes. She sat them down without a word this time and left again.

I took a sip.

'Well, go ahead,' he pushed, his voice still hard.

I started with the most undemanding. Or so I thought. 'Why are you in Big Sur?'

He looked down, folding his large hands together slowly on the table. His eyes flickered up at me from under his lashes, the hint of a smirk on his face.

'Next.'

'But that's the easiest one,' I objected.

'Next,' he repeated.

I looked down, frustrated. I unrolled my silverware, picked up my fork, and carefully speared a ravioli. I put it in my mouth slowly, still looking down, chewing while I thought. The mushrooms were good. I swallowed and took another sip of Coke before I looked up.

'Okay, then.' I glared at him and continued slowly. 'Let's say, hypothetically of course, that... someone... could know what people are thinking, read minds, you know - with a few exceptions.'

'Just one exception,' he corrected, 'hypothetically.'

'All right, with one exception, then.' I was thrilled that he was playing along, but I tried to seem casual.

'How does that work? What are the limitations? How would... that someone... find someone else at exactly the right time? How would he know she was in trouble?' I wondered if my convoluted questions even made sense.

'Hypothetically?' He asked.

'Sure.'

'Well, if... that someone...'

'Let us call him 'Scotty,' I suggested.

He smiled wryly. 'Scotty, then. If Scotty had been paying attention, the timing would not have needed to be quite so exact.' He shook his head, rolling his eyes. 'Only you could get into trouble in a town this small. You would have devastated their crime rate statistics for a decade, you know.'

'We were speaking of a hypothetical case,' I reminded him frostily.

He laughed at me; his eyes warm.

'Yes, we were,' he agreed. 'Shall we call you 'Jane'?'

'How did you know?' I asked, unable to curb my intensity. I realized I was leaning toward him again.

He was wavering, torn by some internal dilemma. His eyes locked with mine, and he was making

the decision right then whether to simply tell me the truth.

'You can trust me, you know,' I murmured. I reached forward, without

thinking, to touch his folded hands, but he slid them away minutely, and I pulled my hand back.

'I don't know if I have a choice anymore.' His voice was a whisper. 'I was wrong - you're much more observant than I gave you credit for.'

'I thought you were always right.'

'I used to be.' He shook his head again. 'I was wrong about you on one other thing, as well. You are not a magnet for accidents - that is not a broad enough classification. You are a magnet for trouble. If there is anything dangerous within a ten-mile radius, it will invariably find you.'

'And you put yourself into that category?' I guessed.

His face turned cold, expressionless. 'Unequivocally.'

I stretched my hand across the table again - ignoring him when he pulled back slightly once more - to touch the back of his hand shyly with my fingertips. His skin was cold and hard, like a stone.

'Thank you.' My voice was fervent with gratitude. 'That's twice now.'

His face softened. 'Let's not try for three, agreed?'

I scowled but nodded. He moved his hand out from under mine, placing both of his under the table. But he leaned toward me.

'I followed you to Big Sur,' he admitted, speaking in a rush. 'I have never tried to keep a specific person alive before, and it is much more troublesome than I would have believed. But that is just because it is you. Ordinary people make it through the day without so many catastrophes.' He paused. I wondered if it should bother me that he was following me; instead, I felt a strange surge of pleasure. He stared, wondering why my lips were curving into an involuntary smile.

'Did you ever that the thoughts, that maybe my number was up the first time, with the van, and that you've been interfering with fate?' I guessed, distracting myself.

'That wasn't the first time,' he said, and his voice was hard to hear. I stared at him in amazement, but he was looking down. 'Your number was up the first time I met you.'

I felt a spasm of fear at his words, and the abrupt memory of his violent black glare that first day... but the overwhelming sense of safety

I felt in his presence stifled it. By the time he looked up to read my eyes, there was no trace of fear in them.

'You remember?' He asked for his angel's face grave.

'Yes.' I was calm.

'And yet here you sit.' There was a trace of disbelief in his voice; he raised one eyebrow.

'Yes, here I sit... because of you.' I paused. 'Because somehow you knew how to find me today...?' I prompted.

He pressed his lips together, staring at me through narrowed eyes, deciding again. His eyes flashed down to my full plate, and then back to me.

'You eat, I'll talk,' he bargained.

I quickly scooped up another ravioli and popped it in my mouth.

'It is harder than it should be - keeping track of you. Usually, I can find someone very easily once I have heard their mind before.' He looked at me anxiously, and I

realized I had frozen. I made myself swallow, then stabbed another ravioli and tossed it in.

'I was tracking Charity-Anna, not carefully - like I said, only you could find trouble in Big Sur - and at first, I did not notice when you took off on your own. Then, when I realized that you were not with her anymore, I went looking for you at the bookstore and I saw her head. I could tell that you had not gone in and that you had gone south…

- And-

I knew you would have to turn around soon. So, I was just waiting for you, randomly searching through the thoughts of people on the street - to see if anyone had noticed you so I would know where you were. I had no reason to be worried... but I was strangely anxious...' He was lost in thought, staring past me, seeing things I could not imagine.

'I started to drive in circles, still... listening. The sun was finally setting, and I was about to get out and follow you on foot. And then - '

He stopped, clenching his teeth together in sudden fury. He tried to calm himself.

'Then what?' I whispered. He continued to stare over my head.

'I heard what they were thinking,' he growled, his upper lip curling slightly back over his teeth. 'I saw your face in his mind.' He suddenly leaned forward, one elbow appearing on the table, his hand covering his eyes. The movement was so swift it startled me.

'It was very... hard - you can't imagine how hard - for me to

simply take you away and leave them... alive.' His voice was muffled by his arm. 'I could have let you go with Charity-Anna and Jeannette, but I was afraid if you left me alone, I would go looking for them,' he admitted in a whisper.

I sat quietly, dazed, my thoughts incoherent. My hands were folded in my lap, and I was leaning weakly against the back of the seat. He still had his face in his hand, and he was as still as if he had been carved from the stone his skin resembled.

Finally, he looked up, his eyes seeking mine, full of his questions.

'Are you ready to go home?' he asked.

'I'm ready to leave,' I qualified, overly grateful that we had the hour-long ride home together. I was not ready to say goodbye to him.

The server appeared as if she had been called. Or watching.

'How are we doing?' She asked Melvin.

'We're ready for the check, thank you.' His voice was quiet, rougher, still reflecting the strain of our conversation. It muddled her. He looked up, waiting.

'Sure,' she stuttered. 'Here you go.' She pulled a small leather folder from the front pocket of her black apron and handed it to him.

There was a bill in his hand already. He slipped it into the folder and handed it right back to her.

'No change.' He smiled. Then he stood up, and I scrambled awkwardly to my feet.

She smiled invitingly at him again. 'You have a nice evening.'

He did not look away from me as he thanked her. I suppressed a smile.

He walked close beside me to the door, still careful not to touch me. I remembered what Charity-Anna had said about her relationship with Buddy, and how they were in the first-kiss stage. I sighed. Melvin heard me, and he looked down curiously. I looked at the sidewalk, grateful that he did not seem to be able to know what I was thinking.

He opened the passenger door, holding it for me as I stepped in, shutting it softly behind me. I watched him walk around the front of the car, amazed, yet again, by how graceful he was. I should have been used to that by now - but I was not. I had a feeling Melvin was not the kind of person anyone got used to.

Once inside the car, he started the engine and turned the heater on high. It had gotten very cold, and the mild weather was at an end. I was warm in his jacket,

though, breathing in the scent of it when I thought he could not see.

Melvin pulled out through the traffic, without a glance, flipping around to head toward the freeway.

'Now,' he said significantly, 'it's your turn.'

10 Souls

Close your eyes if you want,' she said.

I did not. I was not scared. I looked at her and her eyes started to turn green, and her jaw dropped like she saw something scary. She

suddenly recovered. It is normal, 'I will hug myself in the fog. I calm myself down. They were in my old room, sitting on my couch.

Nevaeh sighed but smiled softly.

Lily shrugs and looks across the cafeteria. I followed her gaze, my heartbeat suddenly quickened, and blood rushed to my face.

At the table at the end of the cafeteria is Gabriel Sinclair. He did not seem to notice that his football teammates were joking with

each other, and he stared at me with wide eyes.

It was as if my stomach suddenly went to my throat. My first show was a fun inch to wipe my mouth, worried about where my tuna sandwich had crumbs.

She frowned at him, a big man like their father, capable of punching with the best of them. He was also taller than most men in the courtroom, he was at least a foot taller than her and could intimidate the best of them. Although he does

not look scary, to most people, he is handsome.

I was sitting on the bus trying to draw the shapes of blurry figures speeding by. The rain misted the glass and all I could see were trees. The man sitting next to me was snoring like a pig, and the child behind me kept kicking my chair. Even so, I sat and threw it, hoping to go further and further.

I folded my legs over my chest, wrapped my arms around my calves, and leaned my head against the foggy window, hoping for a good

night’s sleep. No matter how far this bus goes, this will be my last stop.

~*~

A desolate place with dusty shop windows and old men in rocking chairs. This is the quickest way for me to describe a stop in a town far enough away that I have found. Dust swirls around my boots and sticks to my shirt. I did my best, carrying two large suitcases and walking down the dirt road leading to the city center.

I need to find a motel, and I need to find it fast.

'Are you all right, dear?' I did not even notice the little old lady who happened to walk by my side. I am a young girl with nowhere to go.

'Yes ma'am, I'm fine', I lied and put on a fake smile, I hope this will work. She saw it right away.

'I beg to differ. Honey, how old are you?'

I am not sure I should tell this woman my real age. I looked a little old for my age, so I decided that lying was my best bet.

'Miss Sixteen, high school student,' I said bluntly, trying to bypass her and avoid further confrontation. But the old ladies will not give up so soon.

'I may be old, but I am not stupid. Now, wait here, and I will see how much cash I have in my wallet.' The old woman turned and walked back to her porch steps, and I took the opportunity to disappear.

'If you have a bank account, I can write to you', the woman cannot see me anymore, and if I hold my breath long enough, she cannot

hear me either. I looked at the woman looking at where I was standing with a confused look on her face. She looked both ways down the dirt road, then shrugged and walked slowly up the stairs.

I made myself invisible for a while as I followed the trail into town. I try not to give myself too much attention. I am not doing well because I have curious bystanders. This town does not seem to have many tourists. I found a dirty sign that said, ' The Bayard Motel', or at least tried it.

Walk in and it smells like buffed leather and mothballs. Glad I could finally put my suitcase down; I staggered to my desk and rang the rusty Lily. It has not been used in a while.

'That little lady, is there anything I can help you with?!' A strong country accent came from behind. Anyone in town would call it pure hill Amsel.

'Well, I want a room,' I said, wondering what they would think when they saw me. I do not think a

fifteen-and-a-half-year-old girl would get a room like this.

'Well, of course, I mean you came to the motel without tea?' followed by a hoarse cough, then the sound of boots dragging on the hardwood floors.

'Yeah,' I tried to stand a little higher when the man came around the corner. He is what you could call your average western cowboy. He had a scruffy mustache, a ten-gallon hat, a beer Bellay, boots, and a large, buckled belt.

Then buckle up and sit on the stool in front of the counter. He opened a dusty binder and turned to a new page.

'Okay, I need to see ID and social security numbers,' he said formally, twisting his beard. I almost choked, and my face turned red. I completely forgot that ID is needed.

'I- um- I' I was startled when Chuck started laughing because he had never laughed before.

'Escape every time. What is this? A fancy hotel? I do not need ID.

Just your name and the cash on the front.' Chuck patted his right knee, reading his pencil.

'Wait, how do you know I'm a runaway?' I said, starting to rethink the whole idea of running away. Is it that easy to read me?

'Young girls like you are always in and out', I do not know much about Motels, but I know it does not look like people have ever set foot in that place. 'Now, your name?'

I hesitated before saying it clearly and forcefully.

'Melvin'

Lilla looked around the school park. No more empty tables, everyone has someone talking.

She was never close to anyone and was considered odd at school. She thinks colleges should 'take care of their own business', but obviously, that is not possible in a small town like theirs. Everyone is in their business. Probably because she likes those big glasses and baggy long shirts and Jeans, long black hair always in a mess. She just likes to be comfortable.

Luckily, someone had just finished eating and the seat was empty, so she hurriedly put the tray there and sat down. did need not to care that did need not to have friends, sometimes lonely, she ices used to it. Anyway, she did not need to come to school to make friends, she came to study and graduate, so she could work and earn money. After dinner, she decided to lie down on the long wooden bench, Putting the earphones on her ears and listening to nothing. She just wanted to pretend she could not hear

anyone. She closed her eyes and was about to walk away when someone interrupted her.

'Er... miss? the

boy would walk away thinking she could not hear him. Just a heads up, I am wearing headphones. Isn't that the usual 'I don't want to be disturbed' sign?

'Sorry,' he said again, Knocking on the table this time.

She sighed and sat up to stare at a boy who was about to stare

at him, but he… looked cute. So cute. A boy must be an understatement.

'Yes? she asked slowly, the headphones still on.

'This table.' 'He shouted, thinking she could not hear, and pointed to the table. 'Reserved.'

She raised an eyebrow at him, trying not to smile. 'I can hear you perfectly. No yelling.'

Oh… sorry, I thought you could not just because you were wearing headphones.' ' he explained shyly, smiling at her. She just

shrugged and he said nothing, he continued, 'This table is ours. I mean, I am not going to kick you out, just Chiaz hates people sitting here because you are cute, I warn you. He even grinned when he complimented her. Even gave me a shy smile.

She nodded, though she did not understand what he was talking about. She was gone when someone put her arm around her. She looked up and saw a man with long black hair. 'Aaron, as soon as Chiaz finds out you're taking a girl, he'll kill you.
'

Not my girl,' the boy said as Aaron raised his hands, palms up.

Lily posted on camera. She was born. She has done it so many times and it is starting to get boring. She is wearing black lace underwear that complements her long black hair and fair skin. The shoot will be for an adult magazine cover. It is not that bad - what she wears - she wears less. She does not mind, it is work. And it pays well.

She has a lot of billboards and calendars everywhere. She even offers some TV shows, but she always

turns them down. She is great with what she is doing now. A few minutes later, the photographer called for a package. Buddy, her manager, walked up to her, holding a bouquet, and handed her a robe. She smiled and thanked him.

'Someone sent this to you,' Buddy said. He handed her the flower. It was an arrangement of pink gerberas, red carnations, and white mums, wrapped in purple wrapping paper and tied with a ribbon. It used to be beautiful.

'No cards yet? asked Lilla, smelling the flowers.

'No,' Buddy said. 'But they are very pretty flowers.'

I remember when I first walked the runway, I got the same flowers. I wonder who sent it,' 'A fan, but I am surprised fans still have not tried to contact you. They have been with you since the beginning, even before you were not that popular,' Buddy said. 'Anyway, are you hungry?'

I am starving.' I cannot believe this shot lasted for hours. she

complained. 'My stomach is dying.' Do you have anything to eat there?'

Sorry, I did not bring it. Let us eat together.'

I should have asked you to order earlier. I must go home. Mom is waiting.' She pursed her lips and frowned, 'I'm so hungry.' '

'Then let's eat first, there is a food stall outside, or there is a canteen here, I will let someone buy us something to eat.' Buddy urged.

'No, I'll be fine,' she said with a sigh. 'I will change and go to

my mother's house for dinner. She cooks a lot. 'Do you want to come with me?'

No, the girlfriend is waiting.' He shrugged and grinned at her.

She smiled. 'Okay, I'll go alone.' If I starve to death on the road, do not kill yourself. '

He rolled his eyes. 'Like.' Do not overreact, girl.'

She nodded. She was taken aback by what happened suddenly.

She was just resting, and now there were three people in front of her.

Broken said in a monotone, throwing the earphones on the table. Lilla's eyes widened at the rudeness. He did not even apologize for breaking her earphones. He was the one who stepped on it. Rude The guy looked back at the man who was holding Lilla just now. 'I told you not to bring anyone here, Chase,' he said in a cold tone.

'I swear Chiaz, I do not know her. I saw her with Aaron. He pointed at the cute boy.

Aaron shook his head too. 'Hey, it's not me, I just saw her here, maybe she's waiting for you.',

turned his gaze back to Lilla and surveyed her from head to toe. 'She's not my type.' Lily raised her eyebrows and sneered. Just because you are handsome... 'B-hole,' she whispered and left them.

Lilla stared absently at the text, not understanding anything about it. In the school cafeteria again, everyone is so noisy and busy doing their own thing. She prefers to plug her ears with headphones, but

she does not remind her that she needs to buy a new one after school.

When someone sat next to her when she opened a bar of chocolate and started nibbling. She looked at the intruder and saw Aaron. Lovely guy.

'What's going on? he asked gleefully.

The students around became a little quieter, and Chase followed Matt. They all sat in front of her and Aaron.

'No seats.' Matt blurted out.

Aaron chuckled, 'Man, you sound defensive. '

'Shut up.' Matt stared at him.

She looked at the two, then at Chase. 'What are you doing here?' '

As Matt said, there are no seats. Chase shrugged.

She raised an eyebrow. 'You could have sat with the others.' not me. '

Actually,' Aaron said casually. 'We're not going to sit- '

Matt broke his arm with a punch. 'Eat all of you.' '

They all ate in silence. It was embarrassing. Lilla looked at them suspiciously, then looked at her book while nibbling on chocolate. She decided to ignore them. She was alone anyway because they were all Quiet.

'So, Lily, won't those chocolates make you fat? Aaron asked after a few minutes of silence. 'Oh!' he yelled and glared at Matt. 'If you don't stop hurting me, I'll date Lill!' An eyebrow at him and glared

at him, but he blushed before looking away. 'I don't think you can say that about people's food choices.'

Lily applauded Matt's comment but ignored it, saying instead 'How do you know my name?'

'I did. Chase raised his hand like he was in class. 'I hacked into the school database,' he said, laughing.

'Ah...' she said. 'Thought I had to do that.' '

'What! The three of them said in unison. People around watched more of their shouting.

She grinned at them, revealing fully sculpted dimples. Their reactions were amusing.

'Have you hacked into the school's database before?' Chase whispered to her. She nodded smugly. 'Yes, it's easy.' To be honest, it is not very safe. She looked at her watch and finally noticed the time. 'I have to go.' She got up and left without saying goodbye to the three.

Lily sat on the stairs leading to the fire exit. Whenever she needed to make peace with her rowdy roommates, she liked to hang out there, who always chattered about things she was not interested in. She also likes to give them privacy because sometimes she notices that they get quiet whenever she walks into the room. She really cannot blame them, and she does not try to get close to them

She was half awake and half asleep when someone opened the door. She had already lowered

the steps, so she opened her eyes and saw... Matt. Dreaming, she thought about it and closed her eyes again. She should have been more worried because Ise's used to seeing Matt in her dreams, that Hast's been happening a lot lately.

'What are you doing here? asked Dream Matt.

She opened her eyes again, looking puzzled. 'Am I dreaming?' '

He was amused by her cuteness. 'No, you're not, you can't sleep here.'

She breathed angrily and sat up. She remembered him kicking her out of the cafeteria before. 'Why can't I? Do not tell me you own this place too.'

No, I did not...' he said guiltily. He approached her and sat beside her. 'You can't sleep here because...you'll catch a cold.' See what you are wearing.'

She looked down at herself. 'It is very respectable. She is wearing a knee-length shirt and some shorts.

'Yes, it's...but it's thin,' he pointed out and looked away.

She rolled her eyes, deciding not to respond to his comment. 'You're in What's going on here, anyway?'

Here,' he said, taking something out of his hoodie.

She looked at his outstretched hand and saw that he was holding a blue earphone. She raised an eyebrow at him and took it out of his hand. Take the headset. 'What is this?'

Headphones,' he said clearly. 'I broke your earphones

before and you called me an asshole,' he recalled, laughing. 'B- hole,'

'Do you have to repeat it?' She said she felt a little shy about her behavior that day. She did not know he heard it after they spent time together in the cafeteria for the second time. She checked the earphones. It had different shades of blue on the wires, and there was a small dot on the back of the earbud. Heart. 'Cute,'

'I know it's cute...' he shrugged and murmured. 'That's why I chose it for you.,

did not know what to say. She did not know why he was here either. With her.

After a few minutes of eerie silence, she asked innocently to break the atmosphere. 'This is the first time someone has called you a butt.'

Not really,' he laughed when he replied. 'So many girls called me when I broke up with them.'

Want to...' Lilla rolled her eyes. 'When you broke up with them...'

~*~

'Yes, when I broke up with them,' he said.

'You don't have to sound so smug; I don't think that's something you should be proud of.'

I am just telling the truth.'

She sighed and changed the subject 'What year are you from?'

I am in my final year. I should be busy right now. How about you? he asked.

'First grade.' She frowned, thinking about how many years she needed to be in college.

'You hate studying?' Matt noticed her frown at once.

'Not really, I was just… thinking about how a piece of paper is so expensive to die for,' she explained. 'Once he found out I was talking about this, Dad was going to kill me.' '

'Your father?' He asked.

'Yes, my dad.' He recruited me here thinking I would be fine. He

wants me to be a successful person. She snorted. 'Looks like...'

'My dad looks a lot like your dad,' he said with a smile. 'Where's your dad?'

Somewhere outside,' she said. She looked at her watch again. 'Got to go.' See you later. She waved, and he left before he could say anything.

'You've done it twice now.' Goodbye.'

Thinking of this, his hands clenched into fists and his fangs were

about to stretch out. He grabbed her like a raiding serpent and pulled her towards him, he bet it was scary, she could feel Every millimeter of the tough body.' He gasped unexpectedly as she twisted him. She stopped at once, startled by his response to her physical evidence.

'Lily girl. He gasped. 'You're in big trouble now!' ' A low rumbling from the depths of his throat echoed through the room turned into a growl, and he bared his white teeth. His fangs sprouted from hunger.

They locked her eyes, and stared at her in horror, Hooking her face with their hands. With desire flashing in his blue eyes, he lowered his mouth to face her, 'You let me stay for one night. Make effective use of your time. I get a safe word, no permanent marking... oh, one more thing. You better make me scream with joy! Looking at the smile on his face, she reckoned that few girls were giving orders to him.

'Turn around,' he growled, spinning her around so her back was turned away from him. Taking a step

back. Watching her half-stark body appear from her skirt, she heard him gasp. 'I thought I told you to turn around,' he hissed, 'I never allowed you to move!' '

Feeling his strength made her even more excited. If he kept going like this, she was not sure she would make it through the night. He growled when she heard him moving around and the sound of an old latch being opened. Get up. Do not know what is going to cheer you up and try to listen as hard as you can.

Melvin pulls more than a few things out of there, gosh, she wants him to be gentle with her. She seems confident, but it is her first time Leaving the house was also the first night in her life. He sensed the distracting thoughts she was afraid of, he walked towards her, wrapped her arms around her and she was now bare waist and murmured 'Relax. I will not do anything you do not want me to do...unless you secretly want me to. 'He got to the end, relaxed a little under his touch and she nodded, then Melvin picked

her up and threw her high on his bed with a girly beep before he had her, she tried to hold her breath and move the pins under his now shirtless body. If she could be a man, this is the result. Not too muscular, but still toned and chiseled. Perfect skin that seemed to slide over him without hair The slight muscles, just the way she likes it. It makes it easier for her to work her tongue out without those hairs tickling.

Everything goes dark before her eyes get to her lower body. Then she feels something

around her eyes Getting tighter. Blindfolded, she would not mind normally, she had had this fantasy before, but with Melvin? She would rather see his face. Sigh helplessly, leaning against the bed, waiting to see what he has in store for her...

'If you move, I will be forced to whip you. If you understand, nod your head,' Melvin ordered. He came back a few minutes later and started tying her wrists to the posts of his bed. He pulled tight, just to make sure she could not move too much. Bend

Leaning down so she could feel his warm, sweet breath on her face, she asked, 'Will you keep quiet until I let you talk, or let me stop your mouth? Not sure if she was allowed to answer the question, she remained silent. 'Good girl,' he said, kissing her cheek. The first touch of his lips on her skin made her blood boil. Her other senses were elevated by not being able to see, but now she does not care...she is fully prepared now.

She panted when she felt a warm mouth around one of her small chests, and then a sharp pain as he

did to it. It was like being bitten by him, only the teeth were not as sharp. Whatever it was, the pain was accompanied by a burning sensation of pleasure spreading all over her body with the heat, he moved his lips to her neck, feeling the veins pulsing beneath her. His fangs stretched, piercing her skin. She cried and hunched out of the bed. Melvin clenched her hair to keep her from moving, then sucked on her neck.

She quickly put her hands on his shoulders, looked up at his

face, pulled him down, and kissed him slowly.

11 questioning

On the morning of the interrogation, I had a tough time arguing with the part I thought last night was a dream. Logic is not on my side, nor is common sense. I cling to parts I cannot imagine, like her perfume. I am sure I never would have dreamed of it.

It was foggy and dark outside my window, perfect. He has no reason not to go to school today. I was wearing heavy clothes and

remembered that I did not have a jacket. Further proof that my memory is real.

When I went downstairs, Charlie was gone again - I was running later than I thought. I swallowed granola in three bites, ran it straight from the milk carton, and ran out the door. I hope the rain will wait until I find Charity-Anna.

Unusually foggy. The air was almost full of thick smoke. The mist was chill, stuck to the bare skin of my face and neck. I cannot wait to warm up my car. The fog was so

thick that I walked a few yards down the driveway before realizing there was a car inside a silver car. My heart pounded, stammered, then recovered in double the time.

I did not see where it came from, but suddenly it was there, and the door opened for me.

'Do you want to ride with me today?' he asked, amused by my expression as he surprised me again. There was uncertainty in his voice. He gave me a choice I was free to say no, and part of him hoped so. This is a vain hope.

'Yes, thank you,' I said, trying to keep my voice calm. When I entered the warm compartment, I noticed his tan jacket dangling from the passenger seat's headrest. The door closed behind me, and he quickly sat down beside me and started the car.

'I brought you your jacket. I do not want you to get sick or anything.' His voice was cautious. I noticed he was not wearing a jacket himself, just a light white tank-top shirt. The tissue was pressed back against his muscular chest. Keeping

your eyes off his body is a huge tribute to him.

'I'm not that refined,' I said, but I pulled my jacket to my knees and tucked my arms into the long sleeves, curious to see if the smell could be as good as I remembered. This is better.

'It is not true?' Her voice was so low that I was not sure she wanted me to hear it.

We drive on foggy roads, always too fast, and we feel uncomfortable. At least they are. All

the walls collapsed last night ... all of them.

I do not know if we are still honest today. It makes me stammer. I wait for you to speak.

He turned and smiled at me. 'What, not twenty questions today?'

'Does my question bother you?' I asked, relieved.

'Not as much as you do.' He looked like he was joking, but I cannot be sure.

I frowned. 'Am I not responding well?'

'No, that is the problem. You are so calm about everything, it is unnatural. I wonder what you are thinking.'

'I always tell you what I really think.'

'You modify,' he accused.

'Not much.'

'Enough to drive me crazy.'

'You don't want to hear it,' I muttered, in a deep voice. As soon as I said it, I regretted it. The pain in my

voice was faint, I can only hope he did not notice.

He did not answer, and I wondered if I had spoiled the atmosphere. His face was illegible as we drove into the school parking lot. I am late.

'Where is your family?' I asked - nice to be alone with him, but remember his car was usually full.

'They took Vivian's car.' He shrugged and parked next to a bright red convertible filled with gasoline. 'Show off, don't you?'

'Um, wow,' I panted. 'If he did, why would he ride with you?'

'Like I said, he was ostentatious. We tried to fit in.'

'You didn't.' I laughed and shivered as we went down Shaking my head. I am no longer late; his frantic driving gives me plenty of time to go to school. 'So, Vivian is more conspicuous today, so why drive?'

'Didn't you notice? I am breaking all the rules now.' He met me in front of the car and when we entered the campus, he walked up to

me. I wanted to get a little closer and reach out to touch him, but I was afraid he would not like it.

'Why do you have such a car?' I was curious to know. 'Are you looking for privacy?'

'Indulgence,' he admitted with a mischievous smile. 'We all like to drive fast.'

'Numbers,' I whispered.

Under the shelter of the canteen roof, Charity-Anna was waiting, her eyes nearly bulging. On her arm, bless her, is my jacket.

'Hey, Charity-Anna,' I said when we were a few meters away. 'Thanks for remembering.' He handed me my jacket without saying a word.

'Good morning, Charity-Anna,' Melvin said politely. It was not her fault that her voice was so compelling. Or what his eyes can do.

'Uh... hi.' He stared at me with wide eyes, trying to clear up his confused thoughts. 'I think we'll see you at the Trig.' He gave me a meaningful look and I could not help but sigh. What will I tell you?

'Yes, see you then.'

He walked away, stopped twice, and looked back at us.

'What will you tell her?' Melvin murmured.

'Hey, I thought you couldn't read my mind!' I hissed.

'I can't,' he said surprised. Suddenly, a glimmer of illumination flashed in his eyes. 'I can read his, though, he'll be waiting for you to ambush you in the classroom.'

I moaned as I took off his jacket and handed it to him, putting mine on. He folded it over his arm.

'What will you tell her then?'

'A little help?' I pleaded with her. 'What do you want to know?'

He shook his head and smiled wickedly. 'It's not right.'

'No, you don't share what you know, it's not fair.'

He thought for a moment as we left. We stopped outside the door for our first lesson.

'He wants to know if we are secretly dating. He wants to know how you feel about me,' she finally said.

'Oops. What should I say?' I try to keep my face innocent. People passed us on our way to class, staring, but I barely noticed them.

'Hmm.' She stopped and grabbed a lock of hair, which escaped from the knot in my neck, and rolled it back into place. My

heart was beating with excitement. 'I guess you can say yes to the first one ... if you don't mind, that's easier than any other explanation.'

'I don't mind,' I said softly.

'As for your other question... well, I'll hear the answer to that question myself.' The corner of his mouth twitched upward in my favorite jagged smile. I could not hold my breath fast enough to respond to this sentence. Turned.

'See you at lunch,' he called over his shoulder. The three who

entered the door stopped and stared at me.

I rushed to class, blushing and irritated. He is such a liar. Now I am more concerned about what I will tell Charity-Anna. I sat in my usual seat and threw down my bag in a fit of rage.

'Good morning, Lily,' Buddy said from the seat next to me. I looked up to see the strange, almost resigned look on his face. 'How about Big Sur?'

'This is ...' There is no honest way to sum it up. 'Fantastic,' I

concluded weakly. 'Charity-Anna has a very nice dress.'

'Did he say anything about Monday night?' he asked, his eyes lighting up. I smile at the turn of the conversation.

'She said she had a good time,' I assured him.

'He, did it?' he said enthusiastically.

'Surely.' Mr. Stackawitz then called the class and asked us to hand over our papers. The British and the government passed vaguely,

and I worried about how to explain things to Charity-Anna, and I was distressed to know if Melvin would hear what I had to say through Anny's mind. What a drawback to his little talent, when

He did not save my life.

By the end of the second hour, the fog had almost dissolved, but it was still dark with low, oppressive clouds. I smile at the sky.

Melvin is right, of course. When I entered the Trig, Charity-Anna was sitting in the back, almost bouncing off the seat in excitement. I

reluctantly approached her and sat down, trying to convince myself that it would be better to get it over with soon.

'Tell me everything!' he ordered before I sat down.

'What do you want to know?' I argued.

'What happened last night?'

'He offered me dinner and drove me home.'

He glared at me, his expression stiff and suspicious. 'How did you get home so early?'

'He drives like crazy. It is awful.' I hope you heard that.

'It's like a date - did you ask him to meet you there?'

I did not think about it. 'No ... I was surprised to see him there.'

His lips pursed in disappointment at the transparent honesty in my voice.

'But did he come to pick you up from school today?' He probed.

'Yes, that was a surprise too. He noticed I was not wearing a jacket last night,' I explained.

'So, are you going out again?'

'He offered to drive me to Altoona on Saturday because he didn't think the toy car would work, does it count?'

'Yup.' She nodded.

'Well, then yes.'

~*~

'Wow.' He exaggerated the word in three syllables. 'Melvin Shezor.'

'I know,' I agreed. 'Wow' does not even cover it.

'Wait up!' His hands flew up, palms towards me as if he were blocking traffic. 'Did he kiss you?'

'No,' I murmured. 'Not like that.'

She looked disappointed. I am sure I did too.

'Do you think Saturday ...?' She raised her eyebrows.

'I'm really skeptical.' The disapproval in my voice was hard to hide.

'What did you talk about?' he whispered for more information. The class had begun, but Mr. DeVolcano was not paying much attention and we were not the only ones talking yet.

'I don't know, Annyie, a lot of things,' I whispered. 'We talked a little about English composition.' Extraordinarily little. He mentioned it in passing.

'Please, Lily,' he begged. 'Give me some details.'

'Er... well, I have one. You should see the server flirting with him - that is too much. But he does not pay her any attention.' Let him do his best.

'This is a good sign,' he nodded. 'Is it cute?'

'A lot ... and maybe nineteen or twenty.'

'Better. He likes you.'

'I think so, but it is hard to say. It has always been so

mysterious,' I said to his interested and invested, and he sighed.

'I don't know how brave you are to be alone with him,' she whispered.

'Because?' I was shocked, but he did not understand my reaction.

'It is so… scary. I do not know what to tell him.' She grimaced, remembering this morning or last night when he turned his overwhelming gaze on her.

'I had some inconsistency issues when I was with him,' I admit.

'Oh, well. He is incredibly handsome.' Charity-Anna shrugged as if to justify any flaws. Which, in his book, it was.

'For him, there's more.'

'Really? Like what?'

I wish I had let go. Like I wish he were joking and listening.

'I can't explain it well ... but his face is even more incredible.' A vampire who wants to be a good guy - running around saving people's

lives for not being a monster ... I stared at the front of the room.

'Is it possible?' he chuckled.

I ignored her, trying to pretend I was paying attention to Mr. DeVolcano .

'So, you like him?' He had no intention of giving up.

'Yes,' I said briefly.

'I mean, do you really like it?' He pressed.

'Yes,' I said again, blushing. I hope this detail does not come to your mind.

He has had enough monosyllabic answers. 'How much do you like it?'

'Too much,' I whispered. 'I like myself better than him. But I do not know how I can help you.' I sighed; one blush mixed with the other.

Then, thankfully, Mr. DeVolcano called Charity-Anna for answers.

She did not have a chance to start talking about it again in class, and as soon as the bell rang, I avoided it.

'In English, Buddy asked me if you mentioned Monday night,' I told her.

'Are you kidding! What did you say ?!' she gasped, completely lost.

'I told him you said you had a good time - he seemed happy.'

'Tell me what exactly he said and your correct answer!'

We spent the rest of the walk analyzing the sentence structure and most of it In Spanish, a brief description of Buddy's facial

expressions. If I were not worried about the subject coming back to mind, I could not help but draw it.

Then the lunch bell rang. Charity-Anna must have been caught off guard by my excited look as I jumped out of my seat and shoved the book into my bag.

'You weren't with us today, were you?' He guessed.

'I do not believe.' I am not sure it will disappear again.

But outside our Spanish class, leaning against the wall - the

Greek god who seemed more authorized than anyone else - Melvin was waiting for me. Charity-Anna glanced, rolled her eyes, and walked away.

'See you later, Lily.' His voice was reserved. I may need to turn off the ringer on my phone.

'Hello.' His voice was amused and exasperated. He is listening, of course.

'Hello.'

I could not think of anything else to say, and he was not

talking - waiting for his hour I guess - so the walk to the cafeteria was peaceful. Walking into a busy lunch hour with Melvin was like my first day here. Everyone's eyes widened.

He made his way up the line, still not speaking, though his eyes returned to my face every few seconds, their speculative expressions. Anger prevailed over entertainment and became the dominant emotion on her face. I nervously pulled the zipper off my jacket.

He went to the counter and filled a tray with food.

'What are you doing?' I objected. 'Didn't you take all this from me?'

He shook his head and went shopping.

'Sure, half of it is for me.'

I raised my eyebrows.

It led the way to the same place we sat before. At the other end of the long table, we sat face to face with a group of elders who looked at

us in amazement. Melvin seemed unaware.

'Take what you want,' he said, pushing the tray towards me.

'I'm curious,' I said, taking an apple and turning it in my hand. 'What would you do if someone dared you to eat?'

'You are always curious.' He grimaced, shaking his head. He stared at me, stared me in the eye, picked up the slice of pizza from the tray, took a deliberate bite, chewed it quickly, and swallowed it. I looked, and my eyes went wide.

'If someone dares to make you eat dirt, you can, can't you?' he asked condescendingly.

I wrinkled my nose. 'I did it once ... bold,' I admit. 'It's not that bad.'

He smiled. 'I don't think I'm surprised.' Something on my shoulder seemed to catch his attention.

'Charity-Anna is analyzing everything I've done - she'll break it down for you later.' He pushed the rest of the pizza towards me. At the

mention of Charity-Anna, there was a hint of exasperation on her face.

I put down the apple, ate the pizza, and looked away knowing it was about to start.

'So- o the waitress is nice, isn't she?' he asked casually.

'You really haven't noticed?'

'No. I did not. I was thinking a lot.'

'Poor girl.' I can be generous now.

'What you said to Charity-Anna ... well, it bothers me.' He

refused to be distracted. His voice was hoarse, and he looked up from under his lashes, his eyes full of doubt.

'I am not surprised you hear something you do not like. You know what they say about eavesdroppers,' I reminded him.

'I warned you and I would have listened to you.'

'And- I warned you, you don't want to know what I was thinking.'

'You did,' he agreed, always rude. 'You're not right, though. I want to know what you are thinking, everything. I just hope you are not thinking about something.'

I frowned. 'This is a big difference.'

'But that's not the point right now.'

'What is that?' Now we bend toward each other on the other side of the table. His large hands were folded under his chin; I leaned forward and wrapped my right hand around my neck. I had to remind

myself that we were in a busy restaurant and had a lot of curious eyes watching us. It is all too easy to be surrounded by our own little private nerve bubbles.

'Do you really think you care more about me than I care about you?' he murmured, leaning beside me as he spoke, his deep golden eyes piercing.

I try to remember how to look. I had to look away before it came back to me.

'You're here again,' I murmured.

He opened his eyes in surprise. 'Thing?'

'It dazzles me,' I admit, trying to concentrate as I look back.

'Oh.' He frowned.

'It's not your fault,' I sighed. 'You cannot.'

'Answer this question?'

I looked down. 'Yup.'

'Yes, will you answer me, or yes, do you really think so?' He was exasperated again.

'Yes, I really think so.' My eyes stayed on the table; my eyes followed the faux wood pattern printed on the laminate. The silence continued. This time I stubbornly refused to be the first to break it, struggling to resist the temptation to peek into his expression.

Finally, he spoke, his voice soft as velvet. 'You are wrong.'

I looked up, her eyes were exceedingly kind.

'You wouldn't know,' I objected in a deep voice. I shook my head suspiciously, even though my

heart pounded at his words, I desperately wanted to believe it.

'What made you think that?' Her crystalline citrine eyes... I thought, in a vain attempt to erase the truth from my mind.

I turned my head, ignoring his face, trying to understand it, trying to find a way to explain it. I saw him get impatient when I was looking for words. Frustrated by my silence, he began to frown. I raised my hand from my neck and reached out with a finger.

'Let me think about it,' I insisted. Now that he was satisfied that I was about to answer him, his expression became clear. I put my hands on the table and move my left hand so that the palms of the hands are close together. I stared at my hands, twisted, and released my fingers, and finally spoke.

'Well, aside from the obvious, sometimes ...' I hesitated. 'I cannot be sure - I cannot read minds - but sometimes when you say something else it seems like you are trying to say goodbye. That is the

best way, to sum up, to sum up, the pain his words sometimes cause in me. Feel.

'Insightful, 'he whispered. When he confirmed my fears, the pain returned.' That is why you are wrong, 'he began to explain, but then his eyes narrowed.' What do you mean 'obvious? '

'Okay, look at me,' I said, as he was already staring at him. Look at yourself. 'I greeted him and his dazzling perfection.

His brow furrowed angrily for a moment, then flattened again,

with a knowing look in his eye.' You cannot see yourself; you know. I admit you are obsessed with sad things, 'he smiled darkly,' but you have not heard what all the boys in this school thought. Your first day.'

Ah, eyelids, dazed.' I do not think... 'I muttered to myself.

'Trust me once, you are the opposite of the average person.'

When he said that, my embarrassment was much stronger than seeing the joy in his eyes. I at once reminded him of my original argument.

'But I won't say goodbye,' I pointed out.

'Don't you understand? This proves me right. I care more because if I can do it '- he shook his head as if he was struggling with the thought - ' If leaving was the right thing to do, then I would do it to not hurt you, to keep you safe, I will of evil.

'Don't you think I would?'

'You never have to make a choice.'

Suddenly, his inexplicable mood changed again. A sly and

devastating smile rearranged his features. 'Of course, keeping you safe is starting to feel like a full- time job that requires my constant presence.

And get rid of me today, 'I reminded him, thanks for the lighthearted topic. I do not want to say hello to you again. If I had to, I guess I might put myself at risk on purpose to keep him close ... I dismissed the thought before his swift eyes read my face. This idea will surely get me in trouble.

'Anyway,' he added.

'Anyway,' I agreed. I would have argued, but now I hope disaster is expected.

'I have another question for you.' His expression was still nonchalant.

'Shooting.'

'Do you really need to go to Altoona this Saturday, or is this just an excuse not to say no to all your fans?'

I made a face at the memory. 'You know, I haven't forgiven you for Tyler,' I warned him.

'It's your fault he's fooling himself into thinking I'm going to prom with him.'

'Oh, if it were not for me, he would ask if could ... I just wanted to see your face,' he laughed, I would be even more annoyed if his laugh wasn't so charming.' If I asked you, would you refuse me? 'Asked, still talking to himself.

'Probably not,' I admitted. 'But I'll cancel later - pretend to be sick or twist your ankle.'

He was baffled. 'Why do that?'

I shook my head sadly. 'I guess you've never seen me in the gym, but I thought you would understand.'

'You mean the fact that you cannot walk on a flat, stable surface without finding something to stumble upon a problem. 'He was very confident.' He is leading it all.' He saw I was about to protest and cut me off. 'But you never told me did you decided to go to Altoona, or do you mind if we do something different?'

If the 'we' part is there, I do not care.

'I'm open to alternatives,' I concede. 'But I have something to ask.'

He seemed cautious, as he always does when I ask an open question. 'What?'

'Can I drive?'

He frowned. 'Why?'

'Well, mostly because when I told Charlie I was going to Altoona, he specifically asked me if I was going alone when I was doing it. I

would not lie if he asked me again, but I do not think he will ask again, leaving my car at home raises the subject unnecessarily. Also, why are you driving me scared?

Roll your eyes. 'Of all the things I might scare you, you worry I will drive. He shook his head in disgust, but then his eyes turned serious.' Don't you want to tell your father you want to spend the day with me?' His question that I do not understand.

'For Charlie, less is more.' I am sure. 'Anyway, where are we

going?' 'The weather will be fine, so I'll stay out of the public eye ...you can stay with me if you want.' 'Once again, he left the choice to me.

' Do you want to tell me what you mean, about the sun? ''I asked, excited by the idea of revealing another stranger.'

Yes. 'He smiled, then stopped.' But if you do not want to. ... be alone with me, I would rather you did not go to Altoona alone. 'I shudder at the thought of the trouble you can find in such a big city.'

I am pissed. 'Phoenix is three times the size of Altoona - just in terms of population. In terms of size.' Then he closes, 'his eyes made that unfair smoke again.

I cannot argue with the look or the reason, it is a moot point anyway. 'As it happens, I don't mind being alone with you.' '

I know,' he sighed thoughtfully. 'You should tell Charlie, though.'

Why should I do that? ''Give me a little encouragement to get you back.'

I swallowed. But, after a moment of reflection, I was sure. 'I think I'll take my chances.'

He sighed angrily and looked away.

Let us talk about something else, 'I suggested.

'What do you mean? 'He asked. He was still angry.

I looked around to make sure I was not being heard by anyone. As I looked around the room, I saw that his sister Naddalin Natalie was staring at me. Everyone else was

looking at Melvin. Away, walking back to him and asking the first thing that came to my mind...

'Why did you go to that place in Goat Rock last weekend... hunting?' Charlie said that. it was not a good place to hike because of the bears. '

He stared at me as if I were missing something obvious.

'Bear?' 'I gasped and he smiled.' Bears are not in season, you know, 'I added sternly to hide my shock.

'If you read carefully, the law is only about hunting with guns, 'he told me.' He looked and his face slowly sank

Bear? 'I repeated it loudly.

'Grizzlies are Dejen's favorite. ' His voice was still casual, but his eyes were scanning my reaction. I try to cheer myself up.

'Good,' I said, taking another bite of pizza as an excuse to bow my head. I chewed slowly, then took a sip of Coke without looking up.

'So,' I said after a while, finally seeing her now anxious look. 'What do you like best?'

He raised his eyebrows and the corners of his mouth curved down in disapproval. 'Mountain lion.'

'Ah,' I said politely, disinterested, looking for my drink again.

'Of course,' he said, in the same tone as mine, 'we must be careful not to damage the environment with a reckless hunt. We try to focus on areas where there are too many predators, if necessary.

All right. There are always plenty of deer and moose here, and they will, but what is the fun? 'He smiled playfully.

'Exactly where,' I whispered around another bite of pizza.

'Early spring is bear season. Dejen's favorite They just came out of hibernation, so they are more irritable. 'He smiled at a remembered joke.

'There's nothing funnier than an angry grizzly bear,' I nodded in agreement.

Then he grinned and shook his head. Please tell me what you think.

'I tried to figure it out, but I couldn't,' I admitted. 'How do you hunt bears without weapons?'

'Oh, we have the weapons.' He showed a short, menacing smile with bright teeth. I shivered before he exposed me. 'Just not the kind they had in mind when they wrote the hunting law. If you have ever seen a bear attack on TV, you should be able to imagine Dejen hunting.'

I could not stop the later shiver that went through my spine. I looked across the coffee shop to Emmet, thankful he was not looking in my direction. The thick band of muscle that wrapped around his arms and torso was now somehow more menacing.

Melvin followed my gaze and laughed. I stared at him uncomfortably.

'Do you like bears too?' I asked softly.

'More like a lion, or what they told me, 'He said softly. 'Maybe our preferences are indicative.'

I try to smile. 'Maybe,' I repeated. But my mind was full of opposing images that I could not put together. 'Is it something I could, see?'

'Absolutely not!' His face was paler than usual, and his eyes suddenly burned with rage. I leaned back, dazed, though I will never admit it, horrified by his reaction. He leaned back too, his arms crossed over his chest. Um scary for me?' I

asked when I would be able to control my voice again.

'If so, I'll take you out tonight,' he said shrilly. 'You need a healthy fear. There is nothing better for you than this.'

'Then why? 'I insisted, trying to ignore his angry look.

He stared at me for a long time.

- And-

'Then Later, 'he finally said. He stood up with a slight movement.' We will be late.'

I looked around and was surprised to see that he was right, the coffee shop was almost empty. When I was with him, the time and place were so vague that I completely forgot about both. I jumped up and took my bag from the back.

'After that,' I agreed.

12 Balance

I was invisible all my life. Invisible to children at school, to ordinary pedestrians on the street. This is the story of my disappearance. When I heard Melvin,

the most popular boy in my class, call me 'baby' and wave at me, I was shocked, surprised, and frankly happy. For the first time in my life, I was not invisible. Let us just say 15 minutes of my fame did not last. Before long, someone knew or cared who I was. You are invisible again. The rest of that terrible year passed very slowly. It felt like a form of torture. And so, my second year ended, and my first year began. On the first day of school, I put my new goal to the test, which was that no one would leave him, and I did not

care what they thought of me. I entered the school with my head held high and, to my surprise, I gave birth to some children whom I had known all my life, and who miraculously remembered my name. Today it got even weirder because Melvin was talking to me right now. He had nothing better to do or this was a cruel joke when he struck up a conversation with me as I walked into my new locker for the year. I had no idea why, as I saw myself as an uninteresting and unpopular girl, but I was interested in Melvin. When I

got to the closet, Melvin grabbed a pen and a sticky note and wrote his number, tearing the paper in half and asking me to do the same. I typed in my number, and he said thank you, and I left my life just as soon as he got there. Even though I had his number, I told myself I would not be the one texting the other person first.

So, 'I hid again for the rest of the year. It was a pain-free first year. I imagined seeing Melvin everywhere that summer, in the frozen food section of the

supermarket, queuing at the local coffee shop, driving on his bike past my house every morning I ignored this one the cases are just fiction but at the beginning of the school year I felt like maybe I hadn't imagined seeing Melvin all the time like he might be there so I would notice him and maybe he could say something to me Maybe, maybe I wasn't crazy in a way Melvin was the exception to the disappearance that plagued my first three years of high school the first day of the first year was fast approaching, and as the days went

on I got more and more nervous I went to day school and put on my favorite clothes to calm my nerves It was a green shirt with braided belts and long jeans.

Enough to cover my ugly thighs because trust me they are ugly. When I went to school, I felt confident. I had my schedule and my locker number, so I walked to my first class.

Then at night, all the bad dreams, and the flames burned my skin as I swam in the sea of fire, it was like hell. I tried to find my

family. I looked for a way out. I drowned in flames...

When I woke up the whole room was white. 'Is this heaven?' I almost wondered.

'No!' I laughed at someone I did not know was there at first but was not scared.

'What is funny?' She asked me to be angry. 'Nothing. It is funny when someone wakes up in the hospital, they always say, 'Am I in heaven?' They laughed again.

'Who are you?! And where is my father? Then I realized where I was and what had happened. I noticed that my arms were all bandaged

too. When I tried to feel my forehead, a stinging, stinging sensation came over my body. I did not want anyone to tell me what I already knew. The little flame of hope had already been extinguished. That.

'I am Dr. Melvin's father.' He said his expressions ranged from happiness and jest to darkness and

sorrow. 'I knew it. And I also realized that this was my fault because I had just grown up and left my family to die. It is all my fault. I kept repeating it in my head until, I was sure. Then I burst into tears

That was 10 years ago My life has always been frustrating I did not have any friends or anyone to talk to At first I hated them but then I realized I had to get used to them so I or so later a fire broke out and both my uncle and aunt died I was burned alone and had to go to the hospital for three days so it wasn't much Not

like my aunt and uncle died Was this kind of punishment Did I live to be punished?

At first, I thought so, but when I went to high school, I found the source of it. It has been my favorite since I was 14 years old. So now I live with her and her parents. It is not so bad that they treat me well and there has not yet been a fire, but

I saw how the hands moved round and round and almost hypnotized me. Tick, 'I cannot stand it anymore than that sound that pulls

me in and takes me to another dimension...

Mr. Kingsburgh melted his ring, 'Oh dear. Everyone is listening.' Nobody paid attention and kept playing on I- pods, fidgeting with their trigonometry books, or staring at the clock. Mr. Kingsburgh cleared his throat again and then said in a slightly louder voice 'Klaas. Okay, I have important news.' Nobody noticed. I was still staring at the clock. Hypnotized by his voice.

'Tap, tack, tack, tack, tack...' Class! Listen!' cried Mr.

Kingsburgh. I looked at him head- to-head. It took me a while to break out of the ecstasy, but Mr. Kingsburgh's voice helped me. I had never heard him scream so loud. When my face turned to floated above, I saw him His eyes were pale blue, his dirty blond hair The wizard, his muscular arms I dreamed away staring into his eyes and for a moment I thought I saw a glimpse of his eyes looking at me I did not. I do not believe it! But I just imagined it. My mind was swirling with thoughts. Was he?

Wasn't he? Was he? Look, it was not...

'This is Judas,' said Mr. Kingsburgh, his voice low. I stared at him. Then I looked around the class looking for a free seat, an impossible number. I thought the only extra seat was across the room. I could see the lucky person. He did not even see next to him. Here my happiness dropped again, making me feel empty and soulless. I sat there and felt my happiness sinking. It fell on my feet. I felt so far, abandoned, and gloomy... turned off the car and

looked at Singer 'Is that something for you?' I spoke.

'Sure.' She replied with a big smile on her face.

'Okay, I have decided to bring you in. me here, because, you know, my mom was a musician, and I would like to come here and play for her sometimes. Usually at the end of the month, but in this, I came here today because it is the anniversary of her death.'

'When I was in fifth grade, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and I was on chemotherapy,

which I stopped until the summer before my first year when I got it again 'But worse than before. Cancer was more aggressive and surprised her, she lost her strength and eventually her fight.'

The singer sat there absorbing the information she had just been given and brought out Tiger for her, and Nadalyn was lying next to me, right over my mother's grave. 'She would love you,' I said softly as Singer looked at me, a glimmer. hope in her pretty brown eyes We got closer before our lips

finally met That first kiss was one of the best things that ever happened to me, we kissed twice more before I grabbed my guitars and put them back in the car I went back to Singer, I took her hand, and she leaned in.

As we sat there together I somehow felt closer to my mother I knew one hundred percent that if she were still there today, she would have loved Singer I thought about what my mother looked like when I was younger and I am glad I could Know her at least fourteen years of my life The only thing that helped me

live her death day in and day out, Anny was calculated photo of my mother when she was younger. The singer brought me back to reality by asking, 'Melvin, are you okay?'

After all this time, with my mom away, I have never lied when I said, 'Yeah, I'm fine.'

The singer turned and kissed me again. 'I have waited a long time for this. Thank you.'

I said to her, 'You're welcome,' and I accepted her in return. 'We have to start anyway.'

'Yes,' she said, 'my mother will wait for me to eat.'

'Fine,' I said holding her hand as we walked to the car. While I was driving, Singer told me about her mother, how her father left when she was little, and she did not remember him at all. I said, 'Wow, I can't imagine not knowing my father.'

'Yeah, like I never imagined my mom wouldn't be there for me.' We just sat there. I was silent until I entered her hallway. This time I thought I would finally accept it. I

took off my seat belt and turned towards me. 'Thank you for showing me your mother's grave. I understand it was difficult for you and I am honored that you took me with you.'

I leaned over and kissed her before just saying, 'Welcome, singer.' She got out of the car and said goodbye, into the driveway and the house.

Driving away was not as hard as last time, and I came home with plenty of time for dinner. I went to my room after I got home and did

all my homework. It was around 606 PM when we ate my favorite lasagna. We ate and my father said to me, 'So how was your day?'

'It was great,' I said, trying to hide part of the smile I had.

'Will you tell us what happened?' he said, looking at Anny.

'Well, I kissed Singer and tomorrow I'm going to ask her to be my friend.' I spoke.

'Yes!' Anny said before my dad could get anything out of it. 'Now I will meet her.'

'Of course, princess,' said my father, 'and so am I.'

'Yeah, I thought you'd say that and eventually you'd meet her.'

'Don't break her heart now.' my father said.

I said, 'Okay, Dad.' After I washed the dishes, I went to the back porch and called Singer. We talked for so long that my phone's battery started to drain, so I had to say goodbye and goodnight. It was about 1050 PM when I cut the line with Singer, so I quietly climbed the stairs so as not to wake Anny and went to

my room all night. I put my phone on the charger and put on some pajamas and at 1115 I almost passed out, exhausted from the day.

Before I fell asleep, however, I whispered, 'I love you, Mom.' And I swear I heard her whisper again, 'I love you too, honey.' The next morning, I woke up refreshed and reborn. I packed up all my things, got dressed, and had a cup of coffee to go. I got in the car and drove to school, got there with Singer sitting in front of the flagpole. I went to her, my heart out of control

in my chest, and I smiled at her the way she smiled at me. I bent down to sit and as soon as I sat down, I kissed her and said, 'Good morning.'

'In reality.' She replied, somehow surprised that all this happened. I was also surprised. I did not know what would happen if I took her to the cemetery. But the plan went the way I wanted it to, and it is even better. We were studying for an English test after I got there, so the bell rang, and I held her hand as we went to class. I think holding hands is important to people because both

girls and boys whispered in the hallway as we walked. My old friends looked at me in disgust, except my best friend Matt, who shook his head and smiled at me. I should talk to him after school and tell him what was going on.

We finally got to our English room, and I pressed Singer's hand before letting go and we both sat down. After attending the classes, the class started, and I was unable to talk to Singer for the rest of the period. Our schedules split for the rest of the day until lunch, and I met

Singer under our tree outside. She smiled when she saw me, and I smiled, and I was happy to see her.

I told her to bend over to sit down and kiss her on the cheek. I sat next to her on the floor, and we ate lunch and discussed our favorite things. Her favorite movie of all time was 'Paper Towns', and my movie was 'Fault in the Stars'. My favorite sport is Kickball, and her favorite book was Great and Terrible Beauty.

After drinking some more coffee, I laid my head on Melvin's shoulder and he was right there

between his collarbone and neck. I felt safe and secure and never wanted to move again. clock! clock! clock! But unfortunately, at that moment, the bell rang (go to the number), and we went to English. There we learned all about Hamlet and started reading it and watching movies. After English, I went to study economics.

Then I went to some of my other classes and ended up having lunch with Melvin. I had my lunch, a bottle of water, an orange, and a slice of pizza. We got out of the

cafeteria and went to our place by the tree. My (new) friend Andy and Melvin's friend Matt were waiting there. Melvin and Matt talked about things like cars or something. Andy and I talked about our relationships; Of course, I am with Melvin and her boyfriend with our young friend Jake. We met over lunch and exchanged our new cell phone numbers so we could stay connected.

Andy hugged Melvin and I went to the last classroom of the class. If a student at our school has a classroom for his last class, he can

leave the school earlier, if he checks out at the head office before leaving. We worked together on our homework, gathered our things together, went to our lockers, and then to the head office to check out. On the way home, we stopped for ice cream at Dairy Queen. After eating some ice cream, I was full and ready to take a nap. When we got to my house, I was shit. For over an hour and a half until my mother came home, Melvin and I took a nap. I set the alarm for an hour and we both fell asleep in each other's arms.

We must have slept through the alarm because two hours later we woke up rested, but I was worried that my mother would come home. I left a note on the counter that she had an appointment and did not want to wake us up. I was glad she had a date, but a little sad she did not wake me up. I would like to help her get ready. We were awake, better late than never. Melvin was already in the car, so I grabbed an extra blanket to keep warm with my bag. When we got to the beach the place was empty, the lifeguards went. We

found a nice spot by the lifeguard tower and put our blankets on the floor.

Melvin pulled out a bag containing a bag of chips and a bag of pastries. He also had a large thermos filled with fresh hot coffee. We each got a cup and started talking. We discussed things like our pets and childhood best friends and important things like losing parents and war. We talked about music, books, movies, and everything under the sun. I shared more things with Melvin at the time than I told my

mother or even Andy. Sometimes our relationship overwhelmed me, but in the end, I felt like I was with the right person. As the sky began to change color, I returned to Melvin's chest. Again, I felt safe and secure in that perfect moment. The sunset was amazing. There were shimmering shades of pink, shades of red and yellow, and hints of blue and orange. We sat there quietly, thinking, and looking at the sky. I fell asleep about 10 or 15 minutes after sunset, so Melvin picked me up and carried me to the car. He packed the rest of our

things and put them back in the car and drove to my house.

When I woke up, I stretched and yawned, finding out where I was. Melvin was still snoring softly, so I got up carefully, grabbed the skirt of my dress (which I slept in), and went upstairs.

I went to my room and took off my dress and put on my pajama bottoms and shirt. I went back downstairs and gently pushed Melvin until he slowly woke up. He was groggy when he woke up, but his hair was all full and he looked at me

with a friendly smile. I thought I had the best friend ever.

I do not think he knew where he was for another few seconds until I told him, 'We both slept on the couch.' He nodded, smiled, and asked, 'What kind of breakfast?' I laughed and told him we should go out. He liked the idea and said, 'Wow. I just need to go home and change my clothes first.'

When I returned home, I went upstairs to change and then went downstairs to wait for him. He picked me up after about 10 minutes

and we drove to the small restaurant in town. We sat there and ate, talking about the wonderful time we had at the ball. I was glad he was having fun and glad he was the one he chose. After breakfast, we had no idea where to go, but neither of us wanted to go home. We finally decided to hang out in the yard near our homes.

As Melvin pulled the car into the parking lot, I saw a familiar car. It took me a few seconds to figure out why I recognized it, but then it turned out to be my mom's

car. Several thoughts came to my mind Why is my mother here? What does she do? Who is she with? When I came back to reality, I saw my mother holding a man's hand on the hammock. At first, it was weird because my mother was holding a man's hand, but then I was angry because I did not know who he was. I started back to my mother, and I said 'Mom?' At the same time, Melvin said 'Daddy'?

We both looked at each other unbelievably. Our parents were... dating? This was not possible.

it cannot be. My mother had then dropped the man's hand and stood up to say something. I was not ready to hear what she was going to say, so I took Melvin's hand and walked back to his car. He sat in the driver's seat and, without asking where he was going, began to his safe place, the cemetery. We drove to the cemetery; Melvin parked the car at the entrance, and we got out. We walked side by side, hand in hand, silently. I suppose we thought the same... our parents' secret romance. I was still so shocked that I could not even

answer when Melvin reached out my hand and beckoned me to sit with him. I sat next to him, as close to him as I could without sitting on him and put my head under his chin, which made me feel very safe. I just wanted to stay there while Melvin held me forever. I did not want to face the fact that our parents were dating. I went back to my fantasy world for a while, but I went back to reality when Melvin told me the time.

'It's 1255 PM.' He spoke. I thought oh shit my curfew is 1 tonight; I must go home soon. I

mentioned this to Melvin, and we hurried back to the car. He drove me home at the usual speed and it was 100 am when I walked through the front door of my house. I could not tell if my mom was home yet, and it was not because there was no light on, and I could not hear the TV. I went up the stairs and was shocked that I was back home and had been able to stay out of the house. I went to sleep and brushed my teeth but woke up strangely.

'Pap- Titus!' Charlie called as soon as he got out of the car.

As I walked down the porch, I turned to the house and nodded to Chiaz. I heard Charlie greet me loudly behind me.

'I'll pretend I didn't see you driving, Jack,' he said disapprovingly.

'We got our passes early in Reese,' Chiaz said, and I locked the door and turned on the porch light.

Charlie laughed, 'Of course.'

'I have to move somehow.' I easily recognized Mr. Black 's booming voice, despite the years. His

voice suddenly made me feel like a child.

I went in, left the door open behind me, turned on the light, and hung up my jacket. Then I stood in the doorway watching anxiously as Charlie and Chiaz helped Mr. out of the car and into his wheelchair.

I got out of the way as the three rushed in to wipe the rain.

'It was a surprise,' Charlie said.

'It's been a long time,' Mr. Black replied. 'I hope it's not a bad

time.' His dark eyes came back to me, their expressions unrecognizable.

'No, that is great. I want you to keep playing.'

Chiaz smiled. 'That was the plan - our TV was off last week.'

Mr. Black drew a face for his son. 'Of course, Chiaz is looking forward to seeing Lily again,' he added. Chiaz frowned and bowed his head, and I resisted a burst of remorse. You are too camouflaged at the beach.

'Are you hungry?' I asked, turning to the kitchen. I wanted to avoid Mr. Black 's gaze.

'Now we ate before we came,' Chiaz replied.

'What about you, Charlie? She shouted over my shoulder as I ran around the corner.

'Of course,' he replied, his voice moving in the direction of the living room and the TV. I could hear Mr. Black 's chair following Back.

The grilled cheese sandwich was in the pan, and I was

slicing tomatoes when someone was behind me.

'How does this work?' asked Chiaz.

'Very well.' 'I laughed. It was hard to resist his enthusiasm.' And you? Is your car done?

'Number.' Absolute value. 'I still need spare parts, which we borrowed.' He pointed his thumb in the direction of the front yard.

'Sorry. Did not see anything...what are you looking for?'

'Master Tank'. He laughed. What is wrong with the car? Suddenly added.

'Numbers.'

'Oh, I just wanted to know, because you didn't drive.'

I stared at the plate, pulling the edges of the sandwich to check the underside. 'I got a ride with a friend.'

'A nice trip.' Chiaz's voice was full of admiration. 'But I do not know the driver. I thought I knew most of the kids here.'

I nodded noncommittally, closing my eyes as I rolled over my sandwich.

'Looks like my dad knows him from somewhere.'

'Chiaz, can you get me some dishes?' It was in the cupboard above the sink.

'Definitely.'

He took the plate silently. I hope he will abandon her now.

'Who is that?' He asked, placing two plates on the table next to me.

I sighed in failure. Melvin Shezor.

To my surprise, he smiled. I have seen it. It looks a little awkward.

'That explains it,' he said. 'I wonder why my father is behaving so strangely.'

'That's real.' I pretended to be innocent. 'He doesn't like the Shezor.'

'Superstitious old man,' Chiaz murmured.

'Don't you think he's going to say something to Charlie?' I could not help but ask, speaking slowly.

Chiaz stared at me for a moment, and I could not see the expression in his dark eyes. Finally, he replied 'I doubt it. 'Charlie chewed it well last time. They have not spoken much since - I guess tonight is a reunion, I think. I do not think he is going to talk about it anymore.'

I said, trying to sound indifferent.

After bringing the food to Charlie, I stayed in the front room and pretended to be watching the game and Chiaz was talking to me. I was really listening to the men talking and keeping an eye out for Mr. Black to tease me. Any sign and find a way to stop him when he starts.

The night is long. I have a lot of homework to do, but I am afraid to leave Mr. Black alone with Charlie. Finally, game over.

'You and your friends soon Are you going back to the beach?

'Chiaz asked to push his father over the threshold.

'I'm not sure,' I said.

'It's fun, Charlie,' Mr. B.

Charlie encouraged, 'Come to the next game.'

'Of course, of course,' Bailey said. 'We'll be there.' Good night. Her eyes turned to mine, and her smile disappeared. 'Be careful, Lily,' he added solemnly.

'Thanks,' I muttered, looking away.

When Charlie beckoned me from the door, I walked up the stairs.

'Wait, Lily,' he said.

I gritted my teeth. Did Mr. Black have anything before I joined the living room?

But Charlie was relieved, still smiling at the unexpected visit.

'Tonight, I did not get a chance to speak to you. How are you today?

'Okay.' I hesitated for the first step, looking for details that I

could safely share. 'My badminton team won all four games.'

'Wow, I didn't know you could play badminton.'

'Well, actually, I can't, but my partner is really good,' she admitted.

'Who is this?' he asked with interest.

'Uh... Buddy Newton,' I told him reluctantly.

'Oh yes, you said you and Newton's son were friends.' I paid. 'Wonderful family.' Meditate for a

minute. 'Why didn't you ask her to dance this weekend?'

'Dad!' moaned. 'He's dating my friend Charity-Anna. And, you know I cannot dance.'

'Oh, yes,' he murmured. Then he smiled apologetically at me. 'So, it is good for you to go on Saturday...I was going to go fishing with the guys at the station. It should be hot. But if you want to delay your trip so I can get someone.' Go with you, I will stay at home. I know I am leaving you here. So lonely.

'Dad, you're doing great.' I smiled, hoping it would not be a relief. 'I did not. I never thought I would be alone - I love you so much.' I winked at her, and she squinted and smiled.

I slept better that night and was too tired to dream anymore. When I woke up to the light grey morning, I was in a good mood. The tense night with Mr. Black and Chiaz seemed innocuous now; I decided to forget about it entirely. I found myself hissing as I pulled my forehead hair into the bobby pins,

then came back as I jumped down the stairs. Note Charlie.

'You had a great time this morning,' he said of the little boy's lunch.

I shook my head. 'It's Friday.'

I ran for Charlie, second from the left. My bag was ready, my shoes and teeth were brushed, but even though I rushed out the door as soon as I was sure Charlie was out of sight, Melvin was faster. He waited in the gleaming car, the windows closed and the engine off.

This time I did not hesitate because I got into the co-pilot sooner, the sooner I saw his face. He smiled at me and stopped my breathing and my heart. I cannot imagine how angels could be wiser. He has nothing to improve.

'How did you grow up?' asked. I wonder if he knows how wonderful her voice is.

'Particularly good. How was your evening?'

'Attractive.' His smile was funny. I feel like I am missing an inside joke.

'Can I ask what you did? I ask.

'Numbers. 'He smiled. 'It's still mine today.' '

He wanted to know more about people today to know more about him and his hobbies and the things we did together in our free time. Then the only grandmother I knew, a few friends of mine at school, when he I was embarrassed to ask me about a boy I had dated. I am relieved that this conversation could not last long since I have never dated anyone. He is as right as

Charity-Anna, and Jeannette I am surprised by the lack of romance.

'So- o you never met the guy you wanted? he asked in a serious tone that left me wondering what he was thinking.

I am reluctantly honest. Not in Phoenix.

His lips were pressed into a hard line.

We were in the cafeteria. The day went by quickly, soon It became a routine. I took his short break to take a bite of bread.

'I should let you drive yourself today,' he said, a suggestion that came out of nowhere, and I chewed.

'Why? 'I am a student.

'I'm leaving with Naddalin Natalie after lunch.'

'Oh. 'I blinked, confused, and disappointed. 'Fortunately, it's not too far.'

He frowned impatiently. 'I will not take you home. 'We'll get your car and leave it to you.'

I do not have the keys,' she sighed. 'I don't really mind walking.' 'My thought was to waste my time with him.

Shaking my head. 'Your car will be here; the key will be in the ignition - unless you are worried someone might steal it. laughs at the idea.

'Okay,' I agreed with pursed lips. I am sure my keys were in the pocket of a pair of jeans I was wearing on Wednesday, under a pile of clothes in the laundry room. Even if he broke into my house, no matter

what he did, he would never find her. He challenged my approval. He smiled, confident.

'Where are you going then?' 'I asked as casually as possible.

'Hunting,' he answered ignorantly. 'If I had to be alone with you tomorrow, I would take all possible precautions.' ' Staring at his face... pleading. 'You can cancel anytime, you know.' The power of her disguised eyes and the power of his words. I refused to be persuaded to be afraid of him, no matter how real

the danger was. It did not matter, I repeated myself in my mind.

'No,' she whispered, looking into his face. 'I cannot print. 'Maybe you're right,' he whispered sadly. I watched his eyes darken.

I changed the subject. 'What time will I see you tomorrow?' I asked, already frustrated that he was leaving now.

'It depends... it's Saturday, don't you want to sleep?' 'Wonder.'

'No,' I replied quickly. Preventing a smile.

'So, as usual,' he decided. 'Will Charlie be there?'

No, he is hunting tomorrow.' She smiled recalling that everything went well.

His voice became harsh. 'What will he think if you don't come home?'

I replied coldly 'I do not know. 'He knew I was going to do the laundry. He thought I had fallen into the washing machine. I frowned. His anger was stronger than mine.

'What are you chasing tonight?' 'I asked when I was sure I had lost this dazzling game.

'Everything we found was in the garden. We will not leave. 'He seemed disturbed by my flippant mention of his secret truth.

'Why are you going with Naddalin Natalie?' 'I wonder.

'Isn't she the most... supportive.' he said, frowning.

'What about the others?' I asked shyly. 'What are these?'

He frowned slightly.

'Mostly, suspicious.'

I took a quick glance at his family behind me. They were sitting, looking in different directions, like the first time I saw them. Only now they are four years old. Their bronze-haired brother- in- law sat in front of me, Golden eyes full of doubts.

I guess 'They don't like me.'

That is not all,' he disagreed, but his eyes were innocent. 'They don't understand why I can't leave you alone.'

Neither did I.' Then I looked up at the ceiling and met my eyes again. 'I told you cannot see yourself at all. You are not like anyone I have known before. You fascinate me.'

I looked at him, making sure he was joking now.

He smiled when he read my expression. 'I have my advantage,' he whispered, rubbing his forehead cautiously, 'My understanding of human nature is above average. People can expect. But you...you were never what I expected. You always surprise me.'

I looked away and looked back at his family, embarrassed and disgruntled. His words made me feel like I was doing a science experiment. I wanted to laugh at myself because I did not think of anything else.

'Parts are easy to explain,' he continued. I can feel his eyes on my face, but I cannot look at him yet for fear that he will read the sadness in my eyes...and it is hard to describe in words...'

I still stare at the Karen family as he speaks. Suddenly Vivian,

his blond beauty, beautiful sister, turned to me. No, do not look - shining, dark, cold eyes. I wanted to look away, but she kept her eyes on me until Melvin cut him off, his beard making an angry noise. Almost hissing.

Vivian turned her head and felt relieved. I looked at Melvin - I knew he could see the confusion and fear in my wide eyes.

When explaining, his face was tight. 'I am sorry. She is just worried. You see...it is more dangerous to me than spending so

much time with you in public...' He lowered his head.

'What if?'

'If it's over... bad.' He buried his head in his hands, like he had been in Big Sur that night. His pain was obvious. I long for his comfort, but I do not know what to do. I stretched my hand out to him. Still, I quickly dropped it on the table, worried that my touch would only make things worse. I slowly realized that his words must have frightened me, and I waited for that

fear to come, but it felt like everything was a sting of his pain.

And frustration - frustration because Vivian interrupted everything he was going to say. I do not know how to put it back together. His head is still in his hands.

I try to speak in a normal voice. 'Then you have to go now?'

'Yes.' He raised his face. Serious for a while, then his mood changed, and he smiled. 'They still have 15 minutes of tragic movies to endure in terms of biology - I don't think I can take it anymore.'

I have started. Naddalin Natalie, with short jet-black hair and a tangled mess around her beautiful fairy face, stood suddenly behind his shoulders. Even in absolute stillness, her slender figure remained slender and graceful.

He greeted her without taking his eyes off me. 'Naddalin Natalie.'

'Melvin,' she replied, her soprano voice as beautiful as hers.

'Naddalin Natalie, Lily- Lily, Naddalin Natalie,' he waved to us with a wry smile.

Hello Lily. His bright, shining eyes were hard to make out, but his smile was friendly. 'It's good to finally see you.'

Melvin gave her a gloomy look.

'Hello, Naddalin Natalie,' she muttered shyly.

'Are you ready?' She asked him.

His voice is isolated. 'There pick you up in the car.'

I left without saying a word. Her gait was so gentle and so bumpy that I felt a pang of jealousy.

Should I say 'enjoy' or are these bad feelings? I asked him and I went back to find him.

'No, the 'fun' function is the same as any other function.' He smiled.

'Enjoy.' I tried to be sincere. Of course, I did not deceive him. Please try to stay safe.'

'Forex security - what a challenge.'

It is a challenge for you. 'His jaw tightened.' Counting.'

I promise to try.' To be safe,' she read.

'I'll do my best.'

Then he stood up, and so did I. I sighed, 'See you tomorrow. I nodded. With a somber head.

He assured her, smiling crookedly, 'I'll be there tomorrow morning.' 'He touched my face across the table and brushed my cheekbones lightly. Then he turned

and walked away. I looked behind him until he was gone.

I wanted to give up the rest of the day, at least in the gym, but my warning instincts stopped me. I know if I disappear now, Buddy and others will think I am with Melvin. Melvin worries about the time we spend in public...if things go wrong, I refuse to type in the last thought of d million years and instead let me focus. Make things safer.

I know intuitively - and I feel him too - that tomorrow will be critical. Our relationship cannot go

on Balance, like I have been on the edge. We will be on one side or the other, based entirely on his decision or his gut feeling. My decision was made before my conscious choice, and I was determined to see her. Because to me there is nothing scarier and sadder than the thought of leaving him. It is impossible.

I go to class and feel obligated. I cannot honestly say what is going on in biology. My brain was engrossed in my thoughts of tomorrow. At the gym, Buddy was talking to me again. I had a

wonderful time in Altoona. I explained carefully that I canceled my flight and worried about my 0.

'You're going to the prom with Colin? he asked suddenly sullenly.

'No, I'm not going to the dance at all.'

'Then what are you doing?' he asked with interest.

My natural impulse was to tell him to back off. Instead, she blatantly lied.

'Do the laundry and then I have to study for the Trig test, or I'll fail.' 'Did Colin help you with your studies?' 'Melvin won't help me with my studies,'

She claimed. He went somewhere on the weekend. 'The lie was more natural than usual, I noticed with surprise.

'Oh. 'I paid. 'You know, you can dance with our band anyway, and that would be cool. We will all dance with you,' he promised.

The image on Charity-Anna's face made my tone too high.

'I'm not going to the dance, Buddy, okay?'

'Okay. 'No sullener. 'I am just showing. 'The school days are finally over, and I walk into the parking lot absentmindedly. I do not particularly want to go home, but I do not know how he is going to get my car back. Again, I am starting to believe that nothing is for him. Impossible. The last intuition proved correct - my car was parked in the same spot where I parked my Volvo this morning. I shook my head in

disappointment when I opened the door and saw the key for the ignition.

My seat There was a folded white sheet of paper on it. I walked in and closed the door before I could open it. Two words were written in the elegant text.

Beware.

The sound of trucks crashing in my life scared me. I laughed alone.

When I came back, the doorknob was locked, and the latch was open because I left it this

morning. Inside, I went straight to the laundry. It was as if I had left him too. I looked for myself and I checked my pockets when I found them. Empty. I hung up my keys, I thought, shaking my head.

Out of the same instinct I lied to Buddy, I called Charity-Anna under the pretext of good luck dancing to her. When I made the same wish as Melvin, I told him about the cancellation. Extremely disappointed for a third- party monitor. I said goodbye soon after that.

Charlie missed dinner, as I expected, worried about something at work, or a basketball game, or he really liked lasagna - it was hard to tell Charlie.

'You know, Dad...' I began to enter his dreams.

'What's the matter, Bill?' 'You are right about Altoona. I think I will wait until Charity-Anna or someone else can come with me.'

Oh,' he said surprised. 'Well then.' So, you want me to stay home?

'No, Dad, do not change your plans. I have a million things to do...homework, laundry...I must go to the library and the grocery store. I am in and out today Come out. Today...go and enjoy.'

'Are you sure?'

'Sure, Dad. Also, the number of fish in the fridge has been reduced and our stock is down to two or three years, three.'

'Are you sure it's easy to live with Lily?' Smiled.

'I could say the same to you,' I said with a smile. My laughter was gone, but he did not seem to notice. I felt so guilty about cheating on him that I almost asked Melvin for advice and told him where I was going. about.

After dinner, I put my clothes in the dryer. Unfortunately, it is a hands-on job. My brain has a lot of free time, and it is spinning out of control. I vacillated between an anticipation so strong that it was almost painful and a cunning fear that pierced my resolve. I must keep

reminding myself that I have decided and that I am not going back. I took his notes too far out of my pocket to absorb the two little notes he wrote. I told myself over and over that he wanted me to be safe. I will only hold on to the belief that this desire will eventually triumph over others. What is my other choice - cut him out of my life? unbearable. And, since I came to Forex, my life seems to revolve around it.

But a little voice in the back of my head is anxious, wondering if this will hurt me...if it ends badly.

I was only relieved when I accepted that bedtime was late. I knew I was too nervous to sleep, so I did things I had never done before. I deliberately took unnecessary cold medicine - the kind that kept me outside for eight hours. I do not usually tolerate this behavior myself, but tomorrow it is going to get complicated enough without my sleep deprivation being overpowering.

The roar of the car scared me. I laughed to myself.

When I got home the door handle was locked, the bolt was unlocked, I just walked out the door this morning. Inside, I went straight to the laundry room. It is like I left him. I dug into my jeans and checked the pockets after finding them. There is no content. Shaking my head, I might put my key away.

Following the same instinct that made me lie to Buddy, I called Charity-Anna pretending to wish her luck at the dance. When he suggested the same wish for Melvin and the day, I told him about the

cancellation. He was more disappointed than a third- party observer. After that I quickly said goodbye.

Charlie was busy at lunch, worried about something at work, I am guessing, it was the basketball game, or he was just enjoying his lasagna - hard to tell with Charlie.

'You know, father...' I began, drifting off into his dream

'What is it, Lill?'

'You are right about Altoona. I thought I would wait until

Charity-Anna or someone else came with me.'

'Oh,' he said, surprised. 'Well, good. Well, you want me to stay home?'

'No, Dad, do not change your plans. I have a million things to do... homework, laundry... I must go to the library and the grocery store. I am in and out of them all. day ... have fun.

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, then father Besides, the fish in the freezer is getting

dangerous- we've been two, maybe three years.'

You are so easy to live with, Lily.' She smiled.

No. I felt so guilty for cheating. I almost took Melvin's advice and told her where I was. Almost.

After dinner, I folded the laundry and put another load through the dryer. Unfortunately, it is the kind of thing that just keeps the hands. that I have too much free time in my mind, and it is out of control. I am so strong in anticipation

that it almost hurts, and a subtle fear that shows my determination. I had to remind myself that I made a choice, and I did not take it back. Those two he wrote me I pulled his letter out of my pocket more often than I had to swallow the little word. He wanted me to be safe, I told myself repeatedly. I just end up sharing that wish with others. I believe it can be bought. So, what is my other choice - to cut him out of my life? Unbearable. Besides, since coming to McAuley, my life has been about him.

But a little voice in my head worries, will it hurt so much... if it ends?

I was relieved when it was too late to be admitted to bed. I knew I was too stressed to sleep, so I did something I had never done before. I took unnecessary cold medicine on purpose - I was knocked out for eight hours. I do not usually condone this kind of behavior myself, but tomorrow will be complicated without fearing my lack of sleep more than anything else. While I waited for the meds to kick in, I dried

my clean hair until it was straight and thought about what I was going to wear tomorrow. Everything was ready for the morning, I finally slept. I feel hyper; I could not help but twitch. I got up and flipped through the CDs in my shoebox until I found a collection of Chopin's nocturnes. I put it on very quietly and then lay down again, concentrating on relaxing each part of my body. Somewhere in the middle of that workout the chill pills started kicking in and I happily passed out.

Because of my free drug use, I slept well and woke up early. Despite being well rested, I was back to the same excited frenzy from the night before. Hastily dressed, straightened the collar around my neck, rolled up the black sweater until it rested against my jeans. I looked out the window and saw that Charlie was gone. A thin layer of cotton clouds covered the sky. They do not seem extraordinarily strong.

I ate breakfast without tasting it, and after my work, I hurriedly packed. I looked out the

window again, but nothing had changed. I had just finished brushing my teeth and was on my way downstairs when a quiet thump beat my heart against my ribs.

I flew to the door; I had a little trouble with a simple dead bolt, but finally I wiggled the door and there it was. When he looked at her face, all excitement disappeared, and calmness replaced it. I felt relieved - yesterday's fears seemed so silly here.

He was not smiling at first - his face was in a frown. But then, as

he looked at me, his expression lightened, and he laughed.

'Good morning,' he laughed.

'What's wrong?' I looked down to make sure I had not forgotten anything important, like shoes or pants.

'We'll be the same.' He laughed again. I realized he was wearing a long, light black sweater with a white- collar underneath and blue jeans. I laughed at him, hiding a secret regret - why does he look like a runway model when I cannot?

I closed the door behind me as he walked to the car. He was waiting at the passenger door easily understanding the martyr's expression.

'Deal,' I reminded him sarcastically, getting into the driver's seat and reaching to open the door.

'Where?' I asked.

'Put your seat belt on - I'm nervous.'

I gave him a dirty look as I complied.

'Where?' I repeated with a sigh.

'Dad one- Ey- one north,' he ordered.

It was surprisingly hard to focus on the road when I felt his gaze on my face. I paid to drive more carefully than usual in the still sleeping city.

'Are you planning on going out to McAuley at night?'

'This car is your grandfather's car, respect it,' I replied.

Despite his negativity, we were soon out of town. Thick bushes and trees covered with green trees replaced lawns and houses.

'Then turn right,' he pointed when he wanted to ask. I obeyed silently.

'Now we drive until the pavement ends.'

I could hear the smile in his voice, but I was too scared to take the car off the road and look at it and prove him right.

'And what's at the end of the sidewalk?' I am interested.

'A trace.'

'Are we going?' Thank God, I was wearing tennis shoes.

'Is this a problem?' He was expecting.

'No.' I tried to pull off the lie confidently. But if he thinks my car is slow...

'Don't worry, it's only five miles and we're in no rush.'

Five miles. I did not answer so he would not hear my panicked

voice. Five miles of treacherous roots and loose rocks trying to twist my ankles or otherwise wear me down. This is embarrassing.

We drove in silence for a while as we contemplated the horror that lay ahead.

'What do you think?' he asked patiently after a few minutes.

I lied again. 'I'm just confused about where we're going.'

'This is where I like to go when the weather is nice.' After he finished speaking, we both looked

out the windows at the scattered clouds.

'Charlie said it was very hot today.'

'And you told Charlie what you were planning?' - he asked.

'No.'

'But does Charity-Anna think we'll be together in Altoona?' He enjoyed the idea.

'No, I told him you left me - that's true.'

- Does anyone know that I am with you? Anger, now.

- That depends... I thought you told Naddalin Natalie?

'That would be very helpful, Lily,' he said.

I pretended I did not hear it.

'Are you depressed in McAuley to the point of suicide?' He asked when I ignored him.

'You said you might cause trouble for you... let's go out together,' I remembered.

'So, you're worried about the trouble it might cause me if you

don't come home?' His voice was angry and bitterly sarcastic.

I nodded, staring at the road.

He whispered something under his breath, he spoke so fast that I could not understand.

We were silent the whole way. I could feel waves of anger rolling over him and I could not think of anything to say.

- And-

Then the road narrowed to a thin path with a small wooden

marker. I parked on the narrow shoulder and got out, afraid that he would get mad at me and that I was not driving as an excuse not to look at him. It is hot now, hotter than McAuley has been since I arrived, almost cloudy under the clouds. I took off the sweater and tied it around my waist, glad to be wearing a light, sleeveless shirt- especially when I had a five- mile hike ahead of me.

I heard the door close, and I looked back to see him taking off his sweater again. He was facing away

from me in the uncut forest next to my car.

'This way,' he said, looking over his shoulder at me, his eyes still nervous. He entered the dark forest.

'The road?' The panic was clear in my voice as I hurried around the car to get to him.

'I said that there is a road at the end of the road, not because we went through it.

'No trace?' I asked desperately.

'I won't let you get away from me.' Then he turned around with a smile and I caught my breath. His white shirt was sleeveless and unbuttoned so the smooth white skin of his throat flowed over the marble contours of his chest, his perfect muscles no longer meant to be hidden behind the clothes. He was so perfect; I felt a sharp stab of despair. This divine being is not for me.

He looked at me, confused by my tortured expression.

'Do you want to go home?' He said quietly, his voice full of pain that was different from mine.

'No.' I walked forward until I was next to him, anxious not to waste another second of my time with him.

'What's wrong?' he asked, his voice low.

'I'm not a good hiker,' I said flatly. 'You must be very patient.'

'I can be patient if I try hard enough.' Catching my gaze, he

smiled, trying to shake me out of my sudden, inexplicable depression.

I tried to smile too, but my smile was not convincing. He looked closely at my face.

'I'll take you home,' he promised. I cannot say whether the word is unconditional or limited to immediate departure. I knew she thought it was fear that made me nervous, and I was thankful again that I was the only person who did not hear her mind.

'If you want me to walk five miles through the forest before

sunset, you'd better start leading the way,' I said. He looked at my face, struggling to understand my tone and expression.

After a while he stopped and headed towards the forest.

It was not as difficult as I feared. The trail is mostly flat, and it keeps the wet fern and moss away for me. When his straight path took us over fallen trees or rocks, he would help me up, lift me by my elbow, and then let me go as soon as it was clear. His cool touch on my skin never made my heart skip a

beat. Twice, when this happened, I looked at his face to make sure he heard it.

I tried to keep my eyes away from his perfection as much as possible, but I always slipped. Every time I feel sad for her beauty.

Most of the time we go quietly. Every now and then he would ask a random question that he had not been asked in the past two days. He asked about my birthdays, my classmates, my childhood pets - and I must admit that after killing three fish in a row, I gave up on the

whole business. He laughed louder than I used to- like a bell ringing back to us from the empty forest.

The walk lasted most of the morning, but he never showed any sign of impatience. The forest spread around us in an endless maze of ancient trees, and I began to worry that we would never find our way again. He was completely at ease, comfortable in the green maze and had no doubts about our direction.

After a few hours, the light filtering through the attic changed, from a dark olive tone to a brighter

jade. The day became sunny, as he had said before. For the first time since we entered the woods, I felt excitement- which quickly turned to impatience.

'Are we there yet?' I scoffed, pretending to frown.

'Almost.' He smiled at my change of mood. 'Do you see the light in front of you?'

I looked at the dense forest. 'Eh, should it be?'

He smiled. 'Maybe a little early for your eyes.'

'Time to see the optometrist,' I said. His smile brightened.

But then, after a hundred yards, I saw a flash of lightning in the trees ahead, a flash of yellow instead of green. I increased my speed, my enthusiasm increased with each step. He let me continue, watching silently.

I reached the edge of the pool of light and crossed the last edge of the wings into the most beautiful place I had ever seen. The meadow was small, perfectly round,

and full of wildflowers- purple, yellow, and soft white. I heard the music of the bubbling river nearby. The sun was directly overhead, filling the circle with a haze of oily sunlight. I walked slowly marveling at the soft grass, the swaying flowers, and the warm, golden air. I turned around to share with him, but he was not behind me where I had him. I turned around looking for him with sudden excitement. At last, I saw him, still under the thick shadow of the canopy at the edge of the hole, looking at me with wary eyes. Then I remembered

what had been removed from my mind in the beauty of the meadow- the mystery of Melvin and the sun, which he had promised to describe for me today.

I took a step back towards him, my eyes shining with curiosity. His eyes were wary, reluctant. I smiled encouragingly and waved at him, taking another step back. He raised a hand in warning, and I hesitated, falling back on my heels.

Melvin took a deep breath and then stepped out into the bright afternoon sunlight.

13 Delirium

Melvin's Confessions in the Sunlight was shocking. I could not get used to it, even though I had been watching it all afternoon. Her skin, white despite the faint stream from yesterday's fishing trip, sparked limousines of tiny diamonds embedded on the surface.

He was lying completely on the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted and glowing chest, his arms glistening naked. His pale, sparkling lavender eyelids were closed, although, of course, he did not sleep.

A perfect statue, carved from an unknown stone, smooth as marble, shimmering like crystal. From time to time, his lips would move very quickly as if they were trembling.

But when I asked, he told me he sings for himself. It was too low for me to hear it. I also appreciate the sun, even if the air is not dry enough for my taste. I wanted to lie, like him, and let the sun warm my face. But I kept crooked, my chin resting on my knees, not wanting to take my eyes off him. The wind was nice. My hair

tangled and the grass swayed about its fixed shape. The prairie, which was startling to me at first, pales next to its splendor.

Hesitating, I was still afraid, even now, that he would disappear like a mirage, too good to be true… I hesitantly extended his hand and pressed the back of his twinkling hand, as it was within reach. Once again, I marveled at the perfect texture, smooth, bright, and stone- cold texture. When I looked again, his eyes were open, looking at me. Today's Butterscotch is lighter

and warmer after hunting. Her quick smile made the corners of her lips appear flawless.

I am not afraid of you, he asked playfully, but I could hear true curiosity in his soft voice. Not more than usual. Smiles wider. His teeth flickered in the sun. I got closer, reaching out with my whole hand now to trace the contours of his forearm with my fingertips. I saw my fingers trembling and I knew it would not escape his attention. 'Does it bother you?' I asked as he closed his

eyes again. No, he answered without opening his eyes.

'You cannot imagine how that feels. He sighed. I rolled my hand gently over the perfect muscles in his arm, following the faint pattern of blue veins within the crease of his elbow. With the other hand, she reached out to return her hand. After realizing what I was wishing for, he raised his palm in one of his blinding-worrisome motions. This startled me. I froze.

My fingers rested on his arm for a brief second. Sorry, he

whispered. I looked in time to see his golden eyes up close. 'It is so easy to be me with you. I raised her hand, turned it in that direction, and watched the sunshine from the palm of her hand. I held him close to my face, trying to see the hidden sides of his skin.

'Tell me what you think,' he whispered. I looked up to see his eyes looking at me, suddenly deliberately. 'It's always so weird to me, I don't know.' 'You know, the rest of us feel this way all the time.' It is a hard life. I imagined a hint of regret

in his tone. 'But you didn't tell me.' 'I wish I knew what you were thinking…' I hesitated.

- And-

Then? 'I wish I could believe you were real. I wish I were not afraid. 'I don't want you to be afraid.' Her voice was just a whisper. I heard what he could not say frankly that I had no need to be afraid, and there was nothing to be afraid of. 'Well, that is not exactly fear I meant, although that is something to think about. So quickly I missed his move, half sitting, leaning on his right arm,

his left palm still in my hand. The face of his angel was a few centimeters away. Only from my face. I could - I should - turn away from his unexpected proximity, but I could not move. Golden eyes hypnotized me. What are you afraid of then? It is so intense.

But I could not respond. As I did only once, I felt his fresh breath on My face. Sweet, delicious, the smell made my mouth water. It was like nothing else. Instinctively, without thinking, I leaned closer, inspired.

And he was gone, ripping his hand from mine. By the time my eyes took focus, he was twenty feet away, standing on the edge of a small meadow, in the deep shade of huge spruce. He was looking at me, his eyes darkened in the shadows, his expression unreadable. I felt pain and shock on my face. I stung my empty hand. I... Sorry... Melvin whispered. I was I know he can hear.

Give me a moment,' loud enough for my fewer sensitive ears. I sat very still. After ten impossibly long seconds, he slowly turned back

for him. He stopped, still a few yards away, and sank gracefully to the ground, cross- legged. His eyes never left mine. He took two deep breaths, then smiled apologetically. I am so sorry. He is hesitant. 'Do you understand what I mean if I say I am just a human? I nodded once, completely unable to smile at a joke. My adrenaline was pulsing in my veins as awareness of danger slowly sank. He could feel it from where he was sitting.

His smile turned sarcasm. I am the best animal predator in the

world, isn't it? Everything about me calls out to you - my voice, my face, and even my smell. As if I needed it all! Unexpectedly, he was on his feet, turning at once, out of sight, to appear under the same tree as before, having roamed around the meadow in half a second. He said bitterly as if you could pass me. He reached out his hand and with a deafening crack, he effortlessly tore a branch two feet thick from the trunk of a spruce. He prepared it with that hand for a moment, and then threw it very quickly, and

smashed it against a tree. Another huge, I shivered and shivered from the blow.

He was in front of me again, standing two feet away, still like a stone. He said softly as if you could fight me. I sat still, afraid of him more than I had ever seen. I had never seen him Completely liberated from this carefully cultivated facade, he was never less human...or more handsome. Two yen wide like a bird trapped in the eyes of a snake. Her beautiful eyes seemed to sparkle with reckless excitement.

- And-

Then, as the seconds passed, it faded away. His expression slowly transformed into an ancient melancholy mask. He whispered, fear not, his velvety voice inadvertently seductive. 'I promise…' he hesitated. 'Don’t be afraid,' he whispered again as he approached very slowly. He sat zigzag, deliberate non- hasty movements until our faces were flat, feet apart. Please forgive me,' he said solemnly. 'I can control myself. She took me on a whim. But I am on my best behavior now. Wait, but I still

cannot speak. Honestly, I am not thirsty today. I wink. At the time, I must have laughed, though the voice was quivering nor 'How's it going?' he asked tenderly, arriving slowly and cautiously, replacing his marble hand in mine.

I looked at his soft, cold hand, then looked into his eyes. They were companions, repentant. I looked at his hand, then purposely went back to tracing the lines in his hand with my fingertips. I looked up and smiled shyly. His smile in reply was dazzling. So where were we

before I acted so rudely? He asked in the sweet rhythms of the last century.

Honestly, I do not remember. He smiled but his face blushed. 'We were talking about why you were afraid, as well as the obvious reason. 'Oh, that's right.' 'Good?' I looked at his hand and scribbled aimlessly on his soft, iridescent palm. Seconds passed. How easily get frustrated,' he sighed. I looked into his eyes and suddenly realized that this was just as new to him as it was to me.

With so many years of unfathomable experience, it was hard for him too. I was encouraged by this thinking.' I was scared. ...because, for obvious reasons, I cannot stay with you. And I am afraid I would love to stay with you, too much. 'I looked at his hands while I was talking. It was hard for me to say it aloud.' Yes,' he slowly agreed. And he sighed, 'It is something you should be afraid of, really. Desire to be with me. It is not in your best interest. I frowned. I

should have left a long time ago,' he sighed.

'I should leave now. But I do not know. Not if I can.' I mutter pathetically, staring again 'I don’t want you to go.' That is exactly why I should do it. But do not worry. I am a selfish creature. I long for your company so much to do what I must do.' 'I am happy.' Do not be! He pulled his hand more gently this time. His voice was harsher than usual. Difficult for him, even more beautiful than any human voice. It was hard to follow him- his sudden

mood swings always made me regress, into a daze.

'What I want is not just your business! We did not forget it. Never forget that I am more dangerous to you than anyone else. He stopped and looked to see him staring rudely into the woods. I thought for a moment. I do not think I understand exactly what you mean- with that last part anyway,' I said. He looked at me and smiled, his mood changed again. How do I explain myself? He thought. On command, he put his hand back in mine; I held it firmly in both of

mine. He looked at our hands. It is so pleasant, the heat.' He sighed.

A moment passed as he gathered his thoughts. Do you know how everyone enjoys assorted flavors? He began. 'Some people like chocolate ice cream and others prefer strawberries? I nodded. Sorry for the food analogy- I cannot think of another way to explain.' She smiled. He smiled again sadly. As you can see, everyone smells different and has a different essence.

If you shut an alcoholic in a room full of old beer, he will drink it

with pleasure. But he could resist if he wanted to if he was recovering from alcoholism. Now suppose you put in this room a glass of century-old brandy, the rarest and finest cognac - and fill the room with its warm aroma - how do you think it gets away? We sat in silence, looking into each other's eyes - trying to read each other's thoughts.

Break the silence first. This comparison may not be correct. Then it is too easy to refuse brandy. I have turned our alcoholic into a heroin addict instead. So, what you are

saying is I am your heroin brand? She sneered, trying to lighten the mood. He smiled quickly, seeming to appreciate my efforts. 'Yes, you are exactly my type of heroin.' 'Does this happen often?' I asked him. He looked through the treetops, thinking about his answer. I told my brothers about it. He was still looking away,

'To Jae, all of you are so alike. He is the newest to join our family. It is a struggle for him to abstain at all. He has not had time to become sensitive to differences in aroma and flavor.' He looked at me.

Quickly, his expression was apologetic. Sorry, he said. I do not mind. So please do not worry about offending me, scaring me, or anything.

That is what you think. I can understand, or at least try. Just explain while you took a deep breath and looked up at the sky again, so Jae was not sure if he had met someone who looked like - he hesitated, looking for the right word - 'attractive as you are to me. This makes me not think Dejen has been in the wagon for a while. Longer and

he understood what I meant. He says to him twice, once more than the other. 'And for you?'

The word lingered for a while in the stifling air. What is Dejen doing? I asked to break the silence. It was the wrong question to ask. His face darkened; his hand clenched into a fist. He looked away. I waited but he did not answer me. 'I know,' I finally said.

He looked up; His demeanor was subtle, pleading. Even the strongest among us have fallen off the wagon, haven't they?' 'What

are you asking? My will?' My voice sounded louder than I expected. I tried to return the favor - I imagine what his loyalty must be. lost him. 'So, there is no hope? How can I talk about my peace in peace!' No, no, he at once regretted, 'Surely there is hope! I mean, I do not.'

He left this sentence hanging, my eyes burning. 'It is different for us. Dejen... these are strangers you know. It was a long time ago, and he was not used to being the same... be careful as he was.' Now. He was silent and looked

at me carefully, thinking. 'So, if we meet ... or the path is dark or something...' I pulled him. He took it. In the middle of that room. Everything I should not jump over it. It is full of children and,' he stopped suddenly, looking away. 'I would have ruined everything. Melchor built right there when you passed me. If I had denied my thirst for years, I would not have been able to stop it. He stood laughing in front of the trees. He looked at me sadly and missed us both. 'I must think I am

caught. 'I do not understand why. How could you hate me so quickly...'

'To me, you seemed like demon summoned from my hell to destroy me. The smell of your skin...I thought of you. you messed it up on the first day. At that time, I was going to take you out of my room, to do it alone.' I thought of diverse ways. And I fought each of them, thinking of my family, what I could do to them. I had to run; run before I said the words you wanted to follow...' Then he looked at me strangely as I tried to absorb his

painful memories. His golden eyes burned beneath his lashes. It is addictive and deadly. He was coming.'

He promised. I tried to speak calmly. 'Without a doubt. He freed me from the power of his eyes. 'And when I tried to fix my routine in a vain attempt to finish it, look it was close and warm in that small room, the smell was sickening. I almost took it then. There was only one weakling there - extremely easy to deal with. I shivered in the bright

sun, seeing my memories in his eyes, only now I saw the danger.

Poor Mrs. Stackawitz; I was also shocked that I handled his accidental death. But I refused. I do not know how. I force myself not to wait for you, not to follow you from school. It was easier to think clearly, to make the right decision, when I no longer felt it. I left those around me - I was ashamed to tell them how weak I was, they knew something was wrong - and went straight to Melchor, to tell him I was going to the hospital. I watched it in

amazement. I swapped cars with him - he had a full tank of gas, and I did not want to stop. I did not dare to go home to confront SM. You will not let me go without a show. He was trying to convince me that it was not important... 'The next morning, I was in Alaska. He seemed ashamed to have accepted such cowardice. 'I spent two days there with people I knew... but I missed home. I hated it when I found out that I had cheated on SM and my whole adopted family. In the cool mountain air, it was hard to believe that he was unstoppable.

I told myself that he is too weak to run away. I have been tested before, not to this degree, not even close, but I was strong. Who are you, little girl' - she just smiled - 'to chase me away from where I want to be? So, I am back…' He stared into space. I could not speak. I take precautions, hunt, and feed more than usual before I see you again. I was sure I was as strong as anyone to handle it. I was incredibly angry about it. Your reaction to me was so complicated that I could not read your mind. Hearing your words in

Charity-Anna's mind, I did not use to take tricky steps... Her mind is not the first thing, and it was annoying that she depended on it. And then I could not tell if you meant it. It was all very annoying. He frowned at the memory. I wanted you to forget my behavior on the first day if possible, so I tried to talk to you like I would anyone else.

I was looking forward to understanding some of your thoughts. But you were so interesting, I got caught up in your conversations... and from time to

time you stirred the air with your hand or your hair, and the smell came back to me again...

For if I had not saved you, I do not think I could have prevented your blood from being shed before me. exposing ourselves to what we are. But I did not think of that excuse until later. At that time, all I could think was, 'It is not him. Closing his eyes, he is lost in his evil confession. Listen to me, impatient more than thinking. Fear. Common sense told me that I should. Instead, I finally calmed down to understand. And

even now, as he confessed his desire to kill me, I was filled with compassion for his suffering. Although my voice. I lost strength, I was able to speak at last.' In the hospital? His eyes flashed at me. 'I was shocked. I cannot believe I put myself in danger after putting myself in your power- you of all people. As if I needed another reason to kill you.

We both walked out when that word came out. 'But it had the opposite effect,' he continued quickly. 'I fought Vivian, Dejen, and Jae when they said it was time...the

worst fight we have ever had. Melchor stood next to me and Naddalin Natalie. He shivered when he said her name. I could not imagine why.' I listened to you all. I was shocked that you kept your word. I never understood. But I knew that I could not associate with you. I did my best to stay away from you. And every day the smell of your skin, your breath, your hair ... hit me hard like the first day. I met my eyes again, and they were incredibly soft. Still, he continued, if I had exposed all of us in that first moment, where

we are now here- I have no witnesses to stop me and I would be hurting. I was man enough to ask 'why' Lily spoke my full name correctly, then played with her free hand through my hair. He took it off. Panic ran through my body as I was suddenly caught.

You do not know how it hurt me.' He looked down, ashamed again. 'Your thought, still, is white, cold... If I do not see you read again, you can see that spark of understanding in your eyes again. When you see my disguise... It is

impossible.' He raised his big, worried eyes, 'You are the most important thing to me right now, the most important thing to me.' My head was spinning. Suddenly changing the direction our conversation took on the happy topic of my impending death, we revealed ourselves. Suddenly, he waited, and even though I looked down to examine our hands between us, I knew his golden eyes were on me. 'Yes, you know how I feel,' I said at last.' I cringed.

We laughed. I fell in love. I was a lamb...' she whispered, flying away from the words, and hiding her eyes, 'What a stupid sheep,' I muttered, 'what a sharp sick lion.' He stared. In the dark forest for a long time, I wondered where his thoughts took him, and why...? 'I started, I was silent for a while, not knowing what to do. He looked at me and smiled, the sun was shining on him. His face, his teeth. Yes?' 'Tell me why you ran away from me earlier. His smile disappeared. 'You know why.' 'No, I mean what exactly did I do? I must

be careful, you see, so I better start learning what not to do. This is an example' - he slapped the back of his hand. 'It looks good.' He smiled again.

'You didn't do anything wrong, Lily.' But I want to help, if I can, not make it difficult for you. 'Okay...!' he thought for a moment. 'It was the way you were close. Most people automatically avoid us, they hate our isolation... I did not expect you to be this close. And the smell of your throat. He paused. trying to see if I was upset. It is okay, I said

slowly, trying to calm my suddenly tense breath. I stretched my chin. 'No throat exposure. ' It worked; he laughed. 'No, it was more of a miracle than anything. He raised his free hand and placed it gently on my neck. I remained silent; the coldness of his touch was a natural warning- a warning telling me to be afraid. But there was no feeling of fear in me. But there were other feelings... 'You see,' he said. 'Exceptionally good. I was bleeding and I wished I had slowed it down, I felt it making everything more difficult - the sound

of my heart racing. I can hear it. The razor on your cheek is lovely,' he then whispered at that moment at that given time. He let go of his other hand slowly, my hands fell to my knees and slowly caressed my cheek, and then he cupped my face with his marble hands; but gently, he put his cold cheek on the hole at the back of my throat. He sat on it. I cannot move though. I wanted to hear his breathing as I watched the sun, and the wind play with his copper hair more than any other part of his body. and I heard him take a breath. But

his hands moved to my shoulders, and when they stopped, they did not stop. His face turned to the side; his nose brushed my bone. He pressed the side of his face gently to me. Chest, be quiet.

Feel my heart. Well, he breathed. I do not know. that we stayed and how long we did not move. It could be hours. Eventually, the heartbeat subsided, but it caught me. He did not move or speak after that. I always knew it could be more and my life would end- even if I did not realize it so soon. And I could not

be afraid. I could not think of anything else but him touching me. He challenged me. His eyes were peaceful. After that, that is all Gary said happily. Was it too hard for you?' 'It is not as bad as I thought. What about you?'

No, it was not bad...for me. He smiled at the inflation. 'You see what I mean.' I smiled. Here. He took my hand and placed it on his cheek. 'Do you feel how hot it is? And it was so hot, his skin was often cold. But when I touched her face, I could not see what I had been dreaming about

since the first day I saw her. Do not move,' I whispered. No one will ever be like Melvin again. He closed his eyes and became like a carved stone in my hand. I moved slower than he did, being careful not to make an unexpected move. I caressed her cheek, lightly caressed her eyelid, the purple shadow in the hole under the eye. I carefully traced the shape of her perfect nose and her flawless lips.

His lip's part under my hand, and I feel his cool breath on my finger. I wanted to curl up and

breathe in his scent. And when I drop my hand and bend over, I do not want to push him too far. He opened his eyes and was hungry. Not in a shocking way, but by tightening the muscles in the pit of my stomach and making my heartbeat in my veins again. I wish, he whispers, that you...feel the complexity...the confusion... that I feel. You can understand. He raised his hand to my hair, then rubbed it gently over my face. Tell me, I sighed. I do not think I can do it. I told you that on the other hand, I feel for you hunger -

thirst - the miserable creature that I am. And I think you can understand that. Although' - he smiled slightly.

'Then since you are not addicted to any illegal substance, you cannot completely regret it. 'But...' His fingers lightly touched my lips, making me shiver again. 'There are other hungry people. That was a hunger that I did not understand at all. 'Maybe I understand this better than you think.' 'Me? I stopped. 'Nothing at all. He had never known before. He took my hands and put them in his. They feel very weak

because of the strength of the metal. 'I don't know how to touch you,' he admitted.

'I do not know if I can. I slowly leaned forward and warned him with my eyes. I put my cheek on his stone chest. I could hear his breathing, and nothing else. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. Humanly, he put his hands on me and pressed his face into my hair.

'You're better than you give yourself a chance,' I remarked. I have human nerves - they may be buried deep, but they are there. We

stayed like that for another immeasurable moment; I wondered if he was as reluctant to move as I was. But as the light fades, I see the shadows of the forest begin to touch us, and I sigh. You must go.' 'I thought you couldn't read my mind.' It is getting clearer and clearer. I hear a smile in his voice.

He takes my shoulder and I look at his face. 'Can I show you something? he asked, happiness in his eyes. Show me what?' 'I'll show you how to walk in the woods.' He watched my speech 'Don't worry,

you'll be fine, we'll get to your car in no time.' His mouth trembled. He flashed that crooked smile that was so sweet my heart almost stopped. Are you going to turn into a bat?' I ask suspiciously. He laughed louder than I could hear!'

'That's right, I'm sure you'll always find it that way.' 'Come on, you little coward, get on my back.' I waited to see if I was joking, but he was right. He read my doubts and extended his hand, my heart responded, although I could not hear my thoughts, my heartbeat was still

beating, so with little effort, he began to caress my back. When he was there, he hugged me My legs and arms tightly and choked the average person. It is like sticking to a stone. Ah!' he said with a snort. His eyes widen. It was the first time I had seen him so happy. I was surprised, he just grabbed my hand, pressed my palm to his face, and took a deep breath. in everything. The clock ticked.

Then he ran. I was scared in front of him. The rush was nothing compared to what I felt now. Like a

gunshot, he plunged into the thick black forest. There was no sound, no. proof that the feet touched the ground. His breathing did not change, he showed no effort. But the trees passed by at a deadly speed. It was inches away from us. I was too afraid to close my mouth. eyes, although the cold forest wind hit my face and closed it. I felt like I was sticking my head out of the steam train window.

And, for the first time in my life, I felt motion sickness. Then this morning, Melvin, we had walked for

hours to get to the field, and now, in a few minutes, we were back in the car. We were excited, weren't we? to come down. I tried but my muscles did not respond. My arms and legs revolved around him as my head spun. They were locked in. Lily? he asked, worried now. I think I should go to sleep.' I panted. 'Oh, sorry. He was waiting for me, but I could not move.

'I need help.'. He brought me closer to him, he brought me closer to him like a little child. He held me for a moment, then carefully

placed me on a light fern. How are you feeling? he asked. I was not sure how to feel when my head was spinning so much. 'I'm thinking Dizzy' 'Put your head between your knees' I tried that helped a little. I took a deep breath and took it out slowly, leaning my head down and feeling him sit next to me. Seconds passed, and finally, I realized I could lift my head. There was a ringing in my ears. 'I don't think that's a good idea,' he thought. I tried to be sure, but my voice was weak. 'No. This was

fun.' » Ha! You are as white as a ghost- no, as white as I am!'

'I think I should have closed my eyes.' 'Remember next time.' 'Next time!' I cried. He laughed, nervous. you are still shining. Show yourself, he muttered. Open your eyes, Lily, he said softly. Here he is, close to me... His beauty blew my mind - it was too much, more than usual.' I thought, as I ran... he took a break. I hope not to hit the trees.' I am stupid, I am sorry. 'For me, running is second nature, thinking is not an issue for me. show- off, I

mumbled again. he smiles No, he continued, I thought there was something I wanted to try. Again, he covered my face with his hand. breathe and kiss me. He hesitated - in a normal way, not in a normal way.

At that moment before kissing, it is not like he hesitates to see how he receives. He hesitates to extend his time, this is an enjoyable time to wait, and sometimes it is better than kissing. Melvin hesitated to check himself, to see if he was safe, to make sure he was still in control of his urges. And then his

cold and marble lips pressed very gently on me. It is my response that neither of us is prepared for. The blood that boiled under my skin burned my lips. Breathe wildly. My fingers are stuck in my hair, and I turn it around. My head was full of color and my lips parted as I breathed in.

- And-

Then I felt a stone turning from below my lips. His hands gently, but with irresistible force, pushed my face back. I opened my eyes and saw the guard's expression. I felt

relieved. This is an understatement. His eyes were wild, and his jaw was clenched, but he did not utter a word. My face was about an inch away from him. My eyes widened. Should I eat it...?' I will release him; I will give him a certain part. His hands do not allow me to move even an inch. 'My dear.' The sound is smooth and controlled. Looking my eyes at him, the joy in them is faint and soft. Then he gave a surprisingly weak smile. I asked him. We laughed aloud. 'I am stronger than I thought. I wish I could say the same thing.'

Sorry.' 'You're only one person. Thank you very much.'

I said in a crisp voice. He was standing on one of the stairs, his movements were not visible. He was incredibly careful not to contact us. We had recovered more than I thought. He asked me for more help than I thought. My balance has not yet been returned. 'Are you still weak from the competition? Was it my knowledge about the kiss?'

How much light appeared, now he was laughing like a man, his face was not worried. He was

different from Melvin I knew. And I felt a sexual assault on him. Separation causes physical pain. From him now, 'I can't be confident, I'm still in trouble.' I said, 'it is the smaller of the two are you old? Then slowly. I am sure that is true, but I do not think my nerves, or my car, can handle it. Some people believe that is so. My hand was in my pocket, the key was tightly wound. I pursed my lips, then with a strong smile I shook my head. Ai. It is not a chance. He raised his head in disbelief. I went to the driver's side and started walking

around him. If I had not wavered a little, he might have given me a gift. Then again, he could not do it. An arm around my waist created an inevitable trap. Lily, I have made a lot of personal efforts to keep you alive at this time. You cannot even go straight and leave the wheel behind the wheel.

Also, friends do not allow their friends to get drunk and drive,' he said with a laugh. I smelled the unbearable sweet smell coming from her chest. drunk? I resisted him. You are blessed by my presence. He

smiled again. I cannot argue with this' I said breathlessly. There was no road around him; I could not resist him in any way. I threw the key high, I was looking at it like a flash of lightning. 'It's easy for me - my car is old'. He kissed his lips, from my ear to my back, back and forth. We trembled. Anyway, he finally whispered, 'I have better ideas.'

14 Beyond the Mind

He could drive well at reasonable speeds; I must admit. Like so many things, they seemed effortless to him. He barely looked at

the road, but the tires never strayed more than an inch from the center lane. He was driving with one hand, my hand on the seat. Sometimes he looked at the sunset, sometimes he looked at me - my face, my hair blowing through the open window, our hands intertwined. He had turned the radio to an old station, and he was singing a song I had never heard. He knows every line. Do you like fifties music? ' I asked. The music in the fifties was good. Much better than the sixties or seventies, ugh! He shuddered. 'The eighties

were patient. 'Do you ever tell me how old you are?' I asked, hesitant to offend the joker. Is it necessary? His smile, relieved, intact. left. No, but I still wonder...' I mumbled.

'There's no such thing as a mystery to keep you up at night. I wonder if that will annoy you,' he thought to himself. He looked up at the sun; minutes passed. Try me,' I finally said. He sighed, then made his way. He looked into my eyes as if he had completely forgotten. Everything he saw there must have encouraged him. He looked up at the sun, the

light of the changing orb shone off his skin in ruby- like flashes- and he spoke. I was born in Texas in 1901.' He paused and looked at me from the corner of his eye. My face was carefully unsurprised, patient for the rest. He smiled a little and continued. 'Melchor found me in the hospital in the summer of 1918. I was seventeen years old and about to die of the flu in Spain. I could hear my breathing, though it was barely audible to my ears. He looked me in the eye again. I do not remember- it has been a long time, and human

memories fade. He was lost in thought for a moment before continuing. 'I remember how it felt when Melchor saved me. It is not an easy thing; it is not something you can forget. 'Your parents?' 'They died early of the disease. I was alone. That is why he chose me. When the epidemic happened, no one realized that I was gone. How did he... save me? A few seconds passed before he answered. He is choosing his words carefully.

'It was exceedingly difficult. But Melchor has always been the

most compassionate of us. I do not think you can match his. Equally in history.' He paused. 'For me, it was very, very painful.' I could tell from his mouth that he was not going to say anything about it. Although it was active, I bared my curiosity. There were so many things I needed to think about, things that were just beginning to come to mind. No doubt his quick mind already had it all figured out. I missed it. His soft voice interrupted my thoughts. 'It created loneliness. This is mostly the reason behind the choice. I was the first of

the Melchor family, although Karly soon found out. She fell off a cliff. Somehow, even though her heart was still beating, they took her straight to the hospital morgue.

So, you must die, then to be…' We never said the word, and now I cannot decipher it. No, it is just Melchor. He would not do that to someone who had no other choice. The reverence in his voice was deep whenever the spoke of his father figure. 'But it's easy if the blood is weak,' he continued. He looked down the dark path now, and I could feel

the topic closing in. 'And Dejen and Vivian?' Then Melchor brought Vivian into our family. I did not realize until much later that Karly hoped she would be to him what she was to him- he was wary of the idea. Around me. Eyes. 'But she was never more than a sister. It was not until two years later that she met Dejen again. She was hunting- we were in Appalachia at the time. She found a bear about to finish her off. Fearing she could not do it herself, she took him to Melchor, a hundred miles away. What a trip. I was beginning to

think it was hard for her. He was still stuck, brushing my cheek with the back of his hand. But she did,' I encouraged, looking away from the irresistible beauty of her eyes. Yes, he whispered.

'She saw something in her face that made her strong. And they are together.' from. Sometimes they live apart from us, like a couple. But the more we pretend, the longer we can stay in a certain place. McAuley seemed perfect, so we all enrolled in high school.' He laughed. 'We'll have to go to their wedding again in a few

years.' 'Naddalin Natalie and Jae?' 'Naddalin Natalie and Jae are two exceedingly rare creatures. Both developed consciousness, as we call it, without any external guidance. Jae was a different... family, quite different. They wandered in despair. Alone, Naddalin Natalie found her. Like me, she had gifts beyond the norm for our species. 'Really?' I interrupted, I learned. She knows other things. She sees things - she sees things that can be, things that will work, but it is so real, the future is not set in stone.' So quickly I was

not sure what kind of things she sees?' She saw Jae and knew he wanted her before he knew it himself.

She saw Melchor and our family, and they gathered to find us. She is more sensitive to non-humans. She always sees another group of us coming, for example. And any They can pose a threat. 'Are there many... of your kind?' I wondered. How many could walk among us undetected? 'Few. But most of them do not stay in one place. They are the only ones like us' - a sly look in my direction - 'who

can live with humans for a while. We have only had one other family like us in a small town in Alaska. We have been together for a while.' We lived, but because there were so many of us, we became very visible. We lived... that tended to group together in diverse ways.'

'What about the others?' Nomads, mostly. We've all been this way at times. It gets boring like anything else. But we meet with others from time to time because most of us prefer the north. for what We were now standing in front of my

house, and he had turned off the car. It was incredibly quiet and dark; There was no moon. The porch light was off, so I knew my father was not home yet. Are your eyes open this afternoon?' He scoffed. 'Do you think I can walk on Sun Road without causing a traffic accident?' There is a reason we chose the Olympic Peninsula, one of the sunniest places in the world. It is nice to be able to go out during the day. You will not believe how many nights you sleep in eighty years. 'So, this is where the legends come from?' 'Maybe' 'And

Naddalin Natalie was from another family, like Jae?' No, and that is a mystery. Naddalin Natalie never remembers her human life. And you do not know who made her. She woke up alone.

Whoever made it is gone, and none of us understand why or how. If she had not had that other feeling, if she had not seen Jae and Melchor and knew that one day, she would be one of us, she would be completely savage. I still wanted to ask because it was too much to think about. But much to my shame, my

stomach growled. I was so excited that I did not even notice how hungry I was. I just realized I was curious.

'Sorry, I'll stop you from eating dinner.' 'I'm fine.' 'I have never spent much time with a foodie. I forgot.' 'I want to stay with you. It was easier to speak in the dark when I spoke of how my voice betrayed me, my hopeless dependence on him. Cannot log in? Do you like him?' He opened the door for me at once. Very personable.' I thanked him. It is resurrection. He would walk by me at night, so I had to watch him

constantly to make sure he was quiet. He was still there, in the dark he looked so familiar. Still pale, still dreamlike in its beauty, but not a wonderful creature that sparkles on a sunny afternoon.

He reached the door in front of me and opened it for me. I stopped. Halfway through the frame. The door is open. Hey?' No, I used the key under the eaves. I went in, turned on the porch light, and turned to look at him with a raised eyebrow. I was sure I had never used that key in front of him. 'I was excited to meet

you.' 'Did you spy on me?' But somehow, I could not make my voice sound with the proper anger. I was happy for him. I did not repent. 'What else should I do at night? I let him. He walked down the hall to the kitchen for a moment. He was before me; he needed no instructions.

He sat on the chair I tried to guess him. The beauty lit up the kitchen. Without looking back, I focused on my dinner and took last night's lasagna from the fridge, placed a square on the plate, heated it in the microwave, spinning, filling

the kitchen with the aroma of tomatoes and oregano. I did not take my eyes off the plate as I spoke.' How long?' I asked him casually. Hmm? 'Looks like I picked it up from another train idea. I still have not come back. 'How long have you been here?' I come here every night. I turned around in surprise. 'Why?' 'You're charming when you sleep. He said matter- of- fatly. 'You talk' 'No! I gasped; heat flooded my face along my hairline. I grabbed the kitchen counter for help. I knew I was talking in my sleep. My mother teased me

about this. I thought there was something troubling here. Her expression at once turned to sadness. 'Are you so madding at me?'

'It depends! I felt my breath taken away from me. He waited. What about us? He urged. What you heard! 'I cried. In an instant, quietly, he was by my side, holding my hands carefully. Do not be upset! he begged. Catching my eyes, he threw his face to my eye level. I was ashamed. I tried to look away. You miss your mother,' he whispered. 'You worry about her. And when it

rains, his voice relaxes you. You talk a lot about the house, but now it is less often. One day, I asked, 'It is very green. He laughed softly, hoping I could see. I could not have been more disappointed. Anything else?' He knows where I am coming from. 'You said my name,' he said. I sighed in defeat. 'a lot of?' 'How much do you mean exactly?' 'Absolutely! I hung my head. Gently, naturally, I pulled him to his chest. Do not be shy,' he whispered in my ear. 'If I could ever dream, it would be about you. And I would not be ashamed of

it. Then we both heard tires on the brick highway, headlights flashing through the front windows; We saw him coming towards us in the hallway. He stiffened his arms.

Does your father have to know I am here?' He asked. 'I'm not sure...' I tried to think quickly. Another moment then... 'And I was alone.' 'Melvin! I am confused. I heard a ghostly laugh, then nothing else. My father keyed to the door. Lily? he called him. It has bothered me before; Who else would it be?

Suddenly, it does not seem so far off base.

Here., I hoped he could not hear the hysterical edge in my voice. She ate dinner from the microwave and sat at the table as he walked in. Her steps sounded so high after my day with Melvin. Can you tell me a little bit about her? I am thick. He stepped on his heels to take them off, Holding the back of Melvin's chair for the support I took my food with me, and cut it into slices while I ate dinner. My tongue burned. I filled two glasses with milk while the

lasagna was heating up and swallowed two glasses to turn off the heat.

When I put the glass down, I noticed the milk was trembling and I realized that my hands were trembling. It was Charlie sitting in the chair, the contrast between him and his former occupant was comical. He said, setting his food on the table. How was your day?' I asked. The words sped up. I was longing to escape to my room. 'Good. The fish were biting. And you? Did you do all you wanted?' Not really - it

was nice staying inside. I had another great bite. It was a lovely day,' he agreed, I thought to myself. Finished with the last bite of lasagna, I raised my cup and scooped up the rest of my milk, Charlie surprised me by being observant. 'Are you in a hurry?' 'Yeah, I'm exhausted.' I go to bed early. 'You look a little withdrawn,' he said. Why, oh why, should his night be for attention? 'Was I all I could handle in response? He spoke. He thought. Think. I did not answer. No plans tonight? he

asked suddenly. No dad, I just want to get some sleep.'

'None of the townspeople is your kind, right?' He was suspicious, but he tried to play it cool. No, none of the boys have caught my attention yet. I was careful not to overemphasize the boys' words in my quest to be honest with Charlie. 'I thought Buddy Newton might... I said he was friendly.' 'He's just a friend, dad.' Well, you are too good for all of them anyway. Wait until you get to college to start your search. Every father dream of getting his daughter

out of the house before the hormones start. 'Sounds like a good idea to me,' I agreed as I walked up the stairs. Night, my dear,' he called to me. No doubt he had been listening intently all evening, waiting for me to try to sneak up on me. 'See you in the morning, Dad.

You see crawling into my room tonight in the middle of the night to check on me. I made my treading sound slow and tiring as I climbed the stairs to my room. I shut the door hard enough to be heard, then ran on tiptoes towards the

window. I opened it and leaned back into the night. I examined my dark eyes and the impenetrable shadows of the trees. Melvin? Whisper, I feel silly. The quiet reply and laughter came from behind me.

'Yes?' I turned, one hand flying into my throat in surprise. He was lying there, grinning heavily, on my bed, hands behind his head, feet dangling at the end, a picture of relief. Ah! Together, trying to hide his amusement. Just give me a minute to restart my heart. He sat slowly so as not to disturb me again.

Then he leaned forward and extended his long arms to hold me and grabbed my arms as if I were a little child. He sat me on the bed next to him. He suggested, putting a cold hand on My hand, why don't you sit with me? 'How is the heart?'

'You tell me, I'm sure you hear it better than I can.' I felt his quiet laughter rock the bed. We sat there for a while in silence, listening to my slow heartbeat. I thought of Melvin in my room, with my father in the house. I asked him, 'Can I have a minute to be human?' Sure. He

waved his hand. I went on. I said, 'Stay,' I try to sound stern. 'Yes, madam. And it showed that he had become a statue at the edge of my bed. I jumped up and took my pajamas. Off the floor, my bag of toiletries from the office.

Turn off the light, shut the door, and shut the door. I could hear the TV going up the stairs. I knocked loudly on the bathroom door, so Charlie did not bother me. I wanted to speed up. I brushed my teeth hard, trying to be thorough and quick, removing any trace of lasagna. But

the hot water from the shower cannot be rushed. My back muscles relaxed, and my pulse calmed. The familiar scent of the shampoo made me feel like the same person I was this morning. I tried not to think of Melvin sitting in my room waiting, because after that I had to start over with the healing process. Finally, I could not wait any longer. I turned off the water, hurriedly wiped myself, and rushed over again. I put on my gray checkered shirt and pants.

Too late to regret not wrapping the silk Victoria's Secret

pajamas my mother gave me two years ago, on which the cards are still in a drawer somewhere in the house. I rubbed the towel back into my hair, then quickly pulled the brush through it. I threw the towel in the basket and the brush and toothpaste in my bag. Then I went up the stairs so Charlie could see I was in my pajamas, with my hair wet. night, dad. Night, Lily. He was surprised by my appearance. That will stop him from watching me tonight. I climbed the stairs twice at a time, trying to be quiet, and went

to my room, shutting the door tightly behind me. Melvin did not move a fraction of an inch, a statue of Adonis crouched on my dull quilt. She smiled, his lips trembled, and the statue came to life.

His eyes were appreciating me, sucking on the wet hair, the ripped shirt. Eyebrow lift. 'Nice. I frowned. No, that sounds good to you.' 'Thank you,' I whispered. I returned to his side, squatting next to him. I looked at the lines on the wooden floor. Was all that helpful?' 'Charlie thinks I’m sneaking.' 'Ah! He

thought about it. 'Why?' 'As if he couldn’t know Charlie’s mind more clearly than I can guess.' He looked a little excited. 'He raised my chin, examining my face. It looks hot. 'He slowly bent his face toward mine, his gentle cheek pressed against my skin. Still. Mm…' He breathed. It was exceedingly difficult, as he was touching Anna, to formulate a coherent question. It took me a minute of choppy focus to get started. 'It seems... that it is much easier for you, now, to be near me.' 'Does that sound like that to you? he

muttered, his nose sliding into the corner of my jaw. Feeling his hand was lighter than a moth’s wing, brushing my wet hair back so his lips touched the hollow under my ear. I answered as I tried to do.

Well.' I started again, but his fingers were slowly tracing his collarbone, and I lost my train of thoughts. Why is that? That is, it, my voice was trembling, embarrassing me, 'Do you think? I felt his breath tremble on my neck as he laughed.' I thought about it. Pull back; as I moved, he froze, and I could no

longer hear his breath. We looked at each other cautiously for a moment, then, while his clenched jaw gradually relaxed, his expression became puzzled. Did I do something wrong? No, quite the contrary. I explained. That, 'You're driving me crazy.' He thought about it for a while, and when he spoke, he seemed happy.' Really? A triumphant smile slowly lit up his face.

Do you want a round of applause? I asked sarcastically. smiling. I am just pleasantly surprised.' 'For the past 101 years or

so,' said his annoyed voice, 'I've never imagined something like this.' I never thought I would find someone I wanted to be with… in any other way than my siblings. To see, though everything is new to me, that I am so good… to be with you…' 'You are good at everything,' I noted. He shrugged, letting it go, and we both laughed and whispered. But how can it be so easy now? pressed. 'This afternoon…' He sighed- 'It's not easy.' 'But this afternoon, I was still… hesitating. I am sorry about that; it was an unforgivable act of mine. I

disagree, 'It's not unforgivable.' Thanks. He smiles. He continued, looking down now, ' Look, I wasn't sure I was strong enough...' He grabbed one of my hands and pressed it gently to his face. 'And while there was still a possibility I'd be overpowered' - he sniffed the scent on my wrist - 'I was... sensitive.' That was… human.

'So, there is no possibility now?' He repeated, smiling, his teeth gleaming even in the dark. Wow, that was easy, I said. He threw his head back and laughed, softly like a

whisper, but still copious. Easy For you! He straightened, touching my nose with his fingertips. Then his face suddenly became murderous. 'I try,' he whispered, his voice aching. 'If so... so much, I am sure I can leave. 'I frowned. I did not like talking about leaving.' Tomorrow it will be more difficult. 'Today, and I am getting incredibly sensitive. If I am away from you for a while, I will start over. Not from scratch, I guess.' 'Don't go then,' I replied, unable to hide the desire in my voice. He answered, his face resting in a soft

smile. 'Bring the chains- I am your prisoner.

But his long hands were twisted around my wrist as he spoke. He laughed at his soft musical laugh. He laughed more tonight than I have ever heard in all my time with him. You seem more optimistic than usual.' Before. Isn't it supposed to be like this? He smiles.' The glory of first love, and all that. It is amazing, isn't it, the difference between reading something, seeing it in pictures, and experiencing it? 'Very different,' she agreed.

imagined. 'For example,' - his words flowed in fast now, I had to focus on absorbing everything. 'Feelings of jealousy. I have read about him hundreds of thousands of times, and seen actors portray him in thousands of different plays and movies. I thought I understood that clearly. But it shocked me....' 'Do you remember the day Buddy asked you to dance? I nodded, although I remembered that day for a different reason.

'The day you started talking to me again. I was surprised by the mounting resentment, anger, I felt - I did not realize what it was at first. I was more upset than usual for not knowing what you were thinking, and why you were rejecting it. Was that Just for your friend? Was there anyone else? I knew I had no right to care anyway. I tried not to care. Then a line started forming,' he laughed. He frowned in the dark. I waited, with unreasonable eagerness to hear what you would say to them, to watch your expressions. I could not

deny the relief I felt while watching the annoyance on your face.

But I could not be sure. It was the first night I came here. I struggled all night, watching you sleep, with the chasm between what I knew was right and moral and what I wanted. I knew if I kept ignoring you as I had, or if you left for a few years until you go, one day you would say yes to Buddy, or someone like him. You made me angry. Then he whispered, while I was sleeping, I said my name. You spoke so clearly that at first, I thought you woke up.

But you relentlessly turned around and hid my name again and sighed.

The feeling that crossed me at that time was unsettling and staggering. And I knew I could not ignore you anymore. He was silent for a moment, listening to my sudden, uneven heartbeat. But jealousy...a strange thing. Much stronger than I thought it would be. And irrational! Earlier, when Charlie asked you about that bastard Buddy Newton...'He shook his head angrily. I should have known you would listen, moaned. Of course,' 'That

made you jealous?' 'I'm new to this; you're rekindling the human in me.' And everything feels stronger because it is new. But frankly, I sneered, just in my mind, after I heard that Vivian- Vivian, the embodiment of pure beauty, Vivian- was for you. Dejen or not Dejen, how can I compete with this?' No competition. His teeth gleamed. He pulled my entrapped hands around his back and carried me to his chest.

As far as possible, breathe cautiously. 'I know there is no competition,' he muttered in his cold

skin. This is the problem. Sure, Vivian is beautiful in her way, but even if she were not a sister to me, even if Dejen did not belong, she would never be able to get a tenth, no, a hundredth of my attraction. He was serious now, deep in thought. For ninety years, I have been walking among my people, and your people ... All the time I thought I was completely within, not realizing what I was looking for. And I find nothing because you were not alive yet. 'That hardly seems fair,' I whispered, my face still resting on his chest, and I

listen to his breath come and go. I had to wait at all. Why should I get off so easily? 'You're right,' he agreed with amusement. 'I must be harder on you. Release one hand, release my wrist, to collect it carefully in the other. He gently combed my wet hair, from the top of my head to my waist.' 'You just have to risk your life every second you spend with me, surely not much.' Just to turn your back on nature, on humanity...What is the value of that?' 'Very little - I feel deprived of nothing.'

'Not yet. Suddenly her voice was filled with old sadness. I tried to step back, and look at his face, but his hand closed my wrist. With an unbreakable fist. What- - 'I began to ask when her body became alert. I froze, but he suddenly released my hand and disappeared. I hardly avoided falling on my face. I shrieked. I could not tell where he was talking in the dark. I rolled under the quilt, and curled up on my side, as I usually slept. I heard the door open, while Charlie looked inside to make sure I was where I

was supposed to be. I am breathing evenly, exaggerating the movement. A long minute has passed. I listened; I do not know if I heard the door slam. Then Melvin's cold arm was around me, under the covers, his lips to my ear. You are a terrible actor - I would say the career path is yours. I whispered, 'Damn it. My heart was exploding in my chest. Humming a tune, I did not recognize. It sounded like a lullaby. It is off. I laughed- 'Should I sing to you to sleep?' He reminded me, 'You do that all the time.' But I did not know you were

there, I answered here. So, if you do not want to sleep…' He suggested, ignoring my tone of voice. I caught my breath. If you do not want to sleep…? I laughed it off. 'What would you like to do next?' I could not answer at first. I am not sure,' I said at last. Tell me when you decide.

I feel his cold breath on my neck, I feel his nose sliding down my jaw, Mercado. I thought you were insensitive. 'Just because I'm resistant to wine doesn't mean I can't appreciate the bouquet.' ' Yes, it is a day off and no one tells me how

sweet it smells to eat. He laughed, then sighed. I have decided what I want to do,' I told him. 'I want to know more about you.' 'Ask me anything. I revised my questions to find the most important ones.' Why would you do that? 'I said.' I still do not understand how you can work like that it is hard to resist what you are...Please do not get me wrong, of course, I am glad you did. I just do not understand why you bothered yourself in the first place.' He hesitated before answering.

'That's a good question, and you are not the first to ask it. They also question the way we live. But you see, just because we... have been given a certain hand... that does not mean we cannot choose to rise above - to overcome the limits of fate None of us want it. To try to retain all the basic humanity we can.' She remained motionless, locked in a strange silence. 'Did you sleep? He whispered after a few minutes.

No.' 'Is that all you were interested in?' 'I rolled my eyes.' not exactly. 'What else do you want to

know?' 'Why can you read minds - why only you? And Naddalin Natalie, seeing the future… Why is this happening?' She felt him shrug. Shoulders in the dark. 'We do not. I do not know. Melchor has a theory... He believes that we all bring some of our strongest human traits with us into the next life, where they are condensed- like our minds and our senses.

He thinks I must have already been overly sensitive to the thoughts of those around me. And that Naddalin Natalie had some

foreknowledge, wherever she was. 'Then, and in the others?' Melchor brought his sympathy. Karly brought his ability to love passionately. Dejen brought his strength, Vivian her ... perseverance. Or you could call it 'a-laughing,' Jae is remarkably interesting. He was very charismatic in his early life and was able to influence those around him to see things his way. Now he can manipulate the feelings of those around him - calm a room of angry people, for example, or provoke an idle crowd, and vice versa. It is a

very subtle gift. I thought of the impossibilities he had described, trying to understand them. I waited patiently while I was thinking.

So where did all this start? I mean, Melchor changed you, and then someone had to change it, and so... 'Well, where are you from?' has evolved? Establishing? Couldn't we evolve in the same way that other species, predators, and prey have evolved? Or, if you do not believe that this entire world could have happened by itself, which is hard for me to accept myself, is it so hard to

believe that the same force that created the delicate shark with the shark and the baby seal and the killer Mercado could create both species together? 'Let me set the record straight - I'm a baby seal, right?'

'That's right. He laughed and something touched my hair- his lips? I wanted to turn to him, to see if his lips were really against mine. But I had to be good; I did not want to make it more difficult for him than it already was.' Ready to sleep? The short silence interrupted, 'Or do you have any other questions?' 'Just a

million or two.' 'We have tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow...'

He told me. She smiled excitedly at the idea. Are you sure you will not be gone in the morning? Be sure, 'you are legendary, after all.' 'I will not leave you. His voice sealed the promise. 'Again, then, tonight...' She blushed. The darkness did not help - I am sure it could feel the sudden heat under my skin. 'What is this?' 'No, forget it. I changed my mind.' Lily, you can ask me anything. I did not answer and groaned.

I keep thinking it would get less frustrating, and I would not listen to your thoughts. But it gets worse. I am glad you cannot read my thoughts. It is bad enough to listen to my sleep talking. 'Please?' His voice was so convincing that it was impossible to resist. I shook my head. If you do not tell me, I will assume it is something much worse than threatening him with darkness. please? You said that Vivian and Dejen are getting married soon...is...marriage... the same for humans? Seriously laughing now,

understand. 'Is that what you mean?' Fidgeted, unable to answer. Yes, it is the same,' he said. 'I told you, most of these human desires exist, hidden behind stronger desires. Oh, that is all I can say. Was there a reason behind your curiosity? 'Well, I wondered… about you and me… one day…'

He was instantly serious; I could tell by the sudden stillness of his body. I also froze, and I automatically wanted to. 'I don't think...that... it would be possible for us.' 'Because it would be hard for you

if you were… Shut up?' Very brittle. I must be careful of my actions every moment we are together so as not to hurt you. I could kill you quite easily, Lily, just by accident. 'His voice has become just a whisper.

His icy palm resting on my cheek 'If I am too hasty… If I am not careful enough for a moment, you reach out, that is, touch your face, and accidentally crush your skull.' You do not realize how incredibly vulnerable you are. I can never lose any kind of control when I am with you. He waited. He asked me, 'Are

you afraid?' No. I am fine. He was deliberating for a moment. 'I’m curious now, though,' he said, his voice lit up again. 'Have you ever…?'

Suggestively walk away. of course not. I was ashamed. 'I told you I've never felt this way about anyone before, not even close.' I know. It is just that I know other people's ideas. I know that love and lust do not always keep the same company. They do it for me. Now, anyway, let them be there for me at all,' she sighed. That is nice. At least we have that thing in common. He

seemed satisfied. Your human instincts...' I started. I have waited. 'Well, do you find me attractive in this way at all?

He laughed and gently picked up my hair. I may not be a human, but I am a man,' he assured me. forcibly yawned. I answered your questions, now you should fall asleep, 'I insist. I do not know if I could.' 'Do you want me to leave?' 'No! I said very loudly. He laughed, then began to hum the same unknown lullaby. The archangel's voice was soft in I was more tired

than I thought, exhausted from a long day of mental and emotional stress as I had never felt before, I slept in his cold arms.